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Prim Hides Things

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE—A DRAMA OF SOCIAL INTRIGUE IN
WHICH A MOTHER AND A DAUGHTER MATCH THEIR WITS

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MRS. CATOR'S bridge party broke up at two o'clock in the morning, and Fred Bantry was one of a score of people crowding around her to say good night. He received no more than his fraction of a smile, divided by twenty, and was passed on with the rest; but her little thumb rapped one, two, three, four, as their hands touched lightly, and promptly at four o'clock he returned, inconspicuously, to her house. She opened the door to him herself.

"It couldn't wait till after breakfast?" he asked, yawning, with perfect candor, the length of her perfumed drawing-room.

Mrs. Cator danced before him to a recessed divan rich in cushions, nested herself in, like a brilliant yellow-crested bird, took two cigarettes from a box at her elbow, and handed one to Bantry, before she said:

"Were you thinking seriously of breakfast this morning, Freddie?"

Bantry looked down at her with the gently cynical smile which exactly expressed his feeling for Billee Cator.

This glittering, hollow little toy woman had absorbed his whole capacity for loving, in his early twenties. He had crashed badly on a cold mosaic of selfish, unscrupulous wits, under her soft, childish allure, and had come through with a queer, passionless affection for her, as dry and defiant as an immortelle.

She had remained the one woman in his life, but for ten years he had looked on, coldly amused, at her callous exploitation of other lives, amiably disposed to serve her, asking nothing from her in return. She had been a widow for nearly three years, and she wanted to marry Gerrard De Haven, a man ten years younger than herself, for his money.

Bantry drew up a deep chair beside the divan, and made himself comfortable in it.

"I don't usually begin to think about breakfast at all before half past nine," he smiled. "What's the early breakfast excitement, Billee?"

"I had to make sure," replied Mrs. Cator, squinting at him through her gilt eyelashes. "I thought, when you left here to-night, that you were going home to shoot yourself."

"You haven't been in awful suspense, I hope, for the last two hours?" asked Bantry ceremoniously.

Mrs. Cator laughed.

"I thought you would put it off, out of politeness, or curiosity, when I asked you to come back."

"Well, I'm here—and consumed. Now, what is it, Billee?"

"Only that. You looked pretty desperate to-night, Freddie, handing everybody your paper."

"The dickens I did!" exclaimed Bantry, annoyed. "I hope Halsted didn't notice it. He knows I'm leaving for Marseilles with Sir Thomas in the morning. If he's taken it into his head that it means a get-away, I'll find him on my mat, with the milk."

"Is it a get-away?" Mrs. Cator inquired.

"I shall find it convenient to be detained abroad until I see some money. I've used a good deal of Sir Thomas's money this year, and I'll have to put it back before he returns from Egypt."

"Why don't you use some more, and square Ronnie Halsted?"

"Because it would take all I could safely handle. I need most of that to make a start, and Halsted wouldn't hold off a day. It's the beggar's living."

Mrs. Cator lighted another cigarette, blew out a cloud of smoke, and smiled through it at Fred Bantry.

"If there's anything in the old cackle about misery loving company, Freddie, it will freshen you up to hear that he's been making a pretty decent one, lately, out of the last few thousands of my capital."

Bantry came up in his chair with a bound.

"The last—with all Phil's money?" he cried incredulously.

"There wasn't as much of Phil's money as people supposed. There wasn't enough to keep up Ripley. Phil speculated a good deal at the last, the lawyers said. They wanted Ripley sold at once. They wanted me to let this house and go abroad to live,

until they could pull things round. Well, Freddie"—Mrs. Cator shrugged—"dropping out like that wasn't to be thought of. I couldn't be sure Gerry would follow me abroad. His millions were much more important than Phil's thousands. I carried on, and I've had to realize on pretty nearly everything."

"You're sure of De Haven's intentions now, I suppose?" asked Bantry, disturbed.

"Perfectly." Mrs. Cator tittered ironically. "Gerry's intentions are to marry Prim."

"Prim!" Bantry nearly shouted it.

"You're mad, Billee!"

"I'm most frightfully in my right mind. I was mad. I did exactly what you're doing this minute, Freddie—thinking of Prim as she was when I sent her to Brussels. I didn't trouble my head over what three years might have done for a girl at that age. I didn't think twice about letting her come straight to Ripley. I had a crowd down for the week, and didn't bother to make other arrangements for Prim. I forgot the day she was coming, and nobody went to meet her. We were all peacefully drinking tea, on the terrace, when the accident occurred."

Mrs. Cator lifted herself on her little bare elbow, and leaned toward Bantry.

"Freddie, can you imagine a girl just like Phil? Well, then you know what I did for myself last week at Ripley."

She dropped back on her cushions.

"Phil Cator raised from the dead—white as milk, pounds of red hair, those dragging eyes of Phil's, the smile that was the most fascinating thing about him, the voice with the husky, little thrum in it that gets inside your spine. She's as tall as Phil, too, with his long rake of a body, and stork's legs; and she moves exactly like him, as if she was blown along. She's perfectly beautiful—that mysterious, cool, unearthly sort of beautiful that snuffs everybody else out. There we were, Freddie, four as pretty women as you could find in England, with the very best that could be done for us in frocks, and little Primrose Cator, in one of those Belgian atrocities of convent uniforms that the mother abbess perpetrates between her prayers, with black cotton stockings and tennis shoes, going over us like a tank! Eighteen, Freddie, with the impertinence to look every minute of it, and calling me 'mother,' in my own house!"

Bantry's cynical mouth twitched. Mrs. Cator bunched her pillows behind her, sat up, and grinned at him.

"Quaint, isn't it? Shall I go on amusing you, Freddie?"

"Well, it's a tale, Billee!" laughed Bantry. "I'd like to hear what happened to De Haven."

"What happened to Gerry is what's supposed to happen only in books. It happened to both of them. They looked as if they'd been waiting for that minute all their lives. They moved off together"—Mrs. Cator made an undulating movement with her little jeweled hands—"and disappeared silently into the woods. They returned about an hour after dinner was over. I needn't tell you that my house party dissolved in the morning. Those frightened women couldn't get their men away quick enough to a place of safety. All the men would have been as bad as Gerry, if they'd had his chance. Gerry had to bring me up to town in his car—he took me down in it—and of course I shall not let him see Prim again until after we're married."

Bantry whistled.

"You've got some hold on De Haven, then?"

"Not that!" Mrs. Cator snapped her finger and thumb. "But it wouldn't be hard to get a hold on a boy like Gerry."

An odd pain twisted through Fred Bantry. Billee Cator's cynical recital of the disaster she had brought down on her sordid plans had delighted him abominably. It was just this utter callousness of Billee's that fed his own mocking humor. Two young figures detached themselves from it—the girl with her father's cool, unearthly beauty, and a boy on whom it wouldn't be hard to get a hold. Across the glittering figure of the woman who had spoiled his own youth, he saw them looking at each other as if they had been waiting for that minute all their lives.

"I shall want you to help me, Freddie," Mrs. Cator was saying.

Bantry stirred, and passed his hand over his eyes.

"I'll start you off on a good tip, Billee," he found himself, incredibly, responding to that young appeal. "I wouldn't gamble on what you can do with De Haven. He's a pretty bright boy. He's stood out against you for more than two years, and it's my opinion that he means to stand out, Prim

or no Prim. You've got yourself into a pretty deep hole that way, and it's my advice to you, now, to take the safe way out. Push along the young love affair the way it's heading. Let De Haven marry Prim, and get half a million or so as a settlement for yourself. De Haven—"

Mrs. Cator interrupted him with a chill, bright spurt of laughter.

"Thanks, Freddie! You mean well, but half a million for myself and about eleven and a half millions for Prim would strain even my maternal feelings. If you'll put off leaving England until Regatta Day, I'll carry out a little idea of my own. I'll lend you what you—"

"I'll attend to that myself, thanks, if I stay," Bantry cut in brusquely. "What's the little idea?"

"I want you to get Sir Thomas, before he leaves to-morrow, to let the Water Baby to Gerry De Haven for Henley week."

"Does De Haven want the Water Baby for Henley week?" asked Bantry, surprised.

"He wants a house boat. When he was at Ripley I read a letter that he wrote to the Castlereagh boys and left inside his desk." Bantry's eyebrows lifted, but Mrs. Cator went on, not seeing, or not caring. "They're all three going to the Trents, on the Blue Bird, but Gerry wants to get a big house boat, on the quiet, and give a surprise supper dance on Regatta Night."

"Why do you particularly want him to have the Water Baby?" Bantry inquired curiously.

"Because it's so nice and convenient," tittered Mrs. Cator. "Run along now, Freddie, and ring up Gerry in the morning. Ask him if he happens to want a house boat for Henley, or knows anybody who does. He'll do the rest."

"I can do that, certainly," said Bantry slowly; "but I'd like to know a little more about this. I mean the risk—"

"Good night, Freddie!" Mrs. Cator jumped up and put out her hand. "No risk, and I'll tell you all about my plans—let me see—two days before the regatta."

II

Two days before Henley Regatta a long, sinewy, sunburned, originally fair young giant, with light hair rumpled over his blue eyes, which were screwed up with fear and anxiety, ramped the library of the old De Haven house on Hempstead Heath, holding a snapshot of a girl to his thumping

chest and muttering unpleasant things about Billee Cator.

Across the snapshot the girl had scrawled "Prim, belonging to Gerry," and Gerrard De Haven was bitterly defying Billee Cator, wherever she was, to take her daughter away from him.

Up to this moment, and for two years, Gerry De Haven had been what he called "awfully good friends" with Billee Cator. He knew her intimately, and all the intimate facts—that is, her version of the intimate facts—about her. She had told him she had "a great big girl at school in Brussels," hypnotically suggesting, to his mind, a babe of four, or perhaps five, or possibly six. Taking Billee on her looks, this seemed a reasonable age for the child. She had told him that her marriage was unhappy, that widowhood was a blessed release, and at least a hundred times that she wouldn't marry again for love or money.

De Haven did not want her to marry again on his account. He listened without a heartbeat—indeed, he was enormously entertained—when she harped provocatively on marriage, on giving in marriage, and on not giving herself in marriage. She had got off on the subject again last week, at Ripley, when she was alone with him in the moonlit, rose-hung summerhouse in the Ripley rose garden.

"No, Gerry—I love my freedom. I couldn't give it up for any man's love. Of course, you never know your luck. When I get to the dangerous age, I may suddenly go mad over a good-looking boy like you."

"What's the dangerous age, Billee?" he asked, laughing.

"Forty-five."

"That puts a stopper on my hopes. I'll be a beaver before you get to forty-five. You know, you look about sixteen, over there, with moonbeams in your hair."

"Do I? I must start a craze for moonbeams. It isn't moonbeams, though—it's because I'm free from carking care when I'm alone with you, Gerry. Any other unattached man, alone with me in this summerhouse, on this moonlight night, would put ten years on my age. I'd know that he was going to ask me to marry him the next minute, and that he would have to be sent home in the morning, leaving a hole in my house party. That's enough to put ten years on any woman's age. It's really dear of you, Gerry, never to tease me to marry you!"

"It takes control," said De Haven lazily. "If it wasn't for leaving you a man short over Sunday—"

"I could accept you for the week-end!" cried Mrs. Cator, with the little grin that turned her mouth up so deliciously at the corners. "Shall we go into the house and announce it?"

De Haven admired the little grin, and the little shingled, corn-colored head with the moon on it, and Billee Cator's roseleaf skin and childishly blue eyes, and her bits of hands and feet—all the adorable, dimpled littleness of her, which made her impudence enchanting. He considered her altogether a darling, and would have thought himself a silly blighter if he had taken her coquetry seriously, and a conceited ass for supposing that she would marry him if he asked her. Nevertheless, he did not press her to accept him for the week-end, nor did he jump to announce their engagement.

De Haven was not much more than the boy Mrs. Cator called him, but he was every bit the bright boy Fred Bantry called him. Hairbreadth escapes in his early years had sharpened him with women, and he went mailed into these flirtatious encounters with Billee Cator.

He wore mail that had more or less grown to his skin. Under it he was sentimental. In his young head was a clear vision of the girl he wanted to marry—a girl not a bit like darling Billee—and it was the sort of head that can be hacked to pieces without changing anything inside it. His vision came to life for him, cool, sweet, white, virginal, in Billee Cator's daughter.

That meeting between Gerry and Prim was exactly as Mrs. Cator described it. As she told Bantry, what happened to them both was what is supposed to happen only in books. They recognized each other mysteriously, moved away together, and disappeared silently into the woods. When they returned, the moon was high over the Ripley beeches, dinner had been over an hour ago, and the Ripley crowd was at bridge.

"If you haven't been fed by the birds, like the other babes in the woods, you'll find crumbs in the dining room," Billee greeted them brightly, as they came, blinking, into the light, through the long French windows.

They ate crumbs in the dining room, without knowing what they were crumbs of. Then they wandered out again into the

rose garden, and into the summerhouse, and into each other's arms.

"I've always known I should marry you," said De Haven. "Has there ever been any one else, Prim?"

"Never! There couldn't have been."

De Haven slipped his Roman ring from his finger over Prim's.

"Isn't it wonderful, darling? See the 'P' and the 'G' in the monogram! It was my father's—he was Peter Gerrard. Wear it to-night, darling, and in the morning I'll run up to town and get you another, as soon as I've told your mother."

"Take it off my finger and put it on my chain, Gerry. I don't want you to tell mother."

"Not tell? Prim! Why not, darling?"

"Don't you ever feel you don't want to do things and not know why?" asked Prim.

"No, I always want to know why I do or don't do things," answered De Haven, whose mental processes were simpler—he did not know how much simpler—than Primrose Cator's. "I think, darling, we ought to have a pretty good reason for not telling your mother this thing of ours."

"Oh, let's keep it ours!" cried Prim desperately, and turned and clung to him. "Mother spoils things."

"Darling! What a queer—"

"I know it sounds as if—well, we *don't*—mother and I *don't* understand each other very well. I've never told mother things. I had father—"

Prim broke down. De Haven comforted her silently. He thought of Billee Cator's unhappy marriage, and pitied her. This wonderful girl of hers! The father, of course, had come between them.

"Look here, darling," he said gently. "You leave your mother to me. I think I understand her, and I think she'll be pleased about us. I'll do as you wish, of course, about the morning, but I shan't like not playing straight with your mother. I'll have to get away from here. We couldn't hide this, Prim."

"I could," said Prim. It gave him a shock. "I can always hide things."

"Prim! I should hate you to do that with me!"

"I shouldn't want to," Prim said, looking at him anxiously.

Their eyes met in a moment of troubled silence. Then De Haven said:

"Listen, Prim! I'll wait a week before I speak to your mother. Then I want you

to let me tell her. That will bring us to Henley, won't it?" He brightened. "I'll tell you what! I'll get your mother to give that dance, on my house boat, for you, and she'll tell everybody about us."

"If mother lets me—"

"Let's you?" interrupted De Haven, astonished and a little angry. "Why shouldn't she let you marry me?"

"I meant, if she lets me go to Henley," replied Prim, already beginning to hide things from Gerry.

"Oh, well, darling," he laughed, "that'll be settled when I tell her, won't it?" He kissed her confidently, and added, with an engaging touch of diffidence: "I think—well, you've been away from your mother for a long time, Prim, and that makes a difference, doesn't it? Perhaps you'll understand her better now, and feel like being more open with her. You don't think it's cheek of me to say this to you—preaching, or anything like that? I'm only thinking it would be jolly, being good friends all round."

"I think you're beautiful, Gerry! You can say everything to me," replied Prim sweetly.

"And you will to me, *always*, won't you, Prim?" he asked, going back to it.

"I'll do anything and everything to make you happy," Prim answered, with her white eyelids down.

Primrose Cator was Phil Cator raised from the dead—clever, observant, sensitive, with an infinite capacity for keeping still. At the same time she was Billee Cator's daughter, and, in a pure-intentioned way, as *rusée* as her worldly little mother. Quite fifteen when her father died and she was sent away to school at Brussels, she took with her a shrewd, sad idea of what had broken his life. She knew that her mother went after strange gods, worshiped the golden calf, and set up in the groves a temple to her own beauty.

Prim's seeing eyes had counted noses among the peaceful tea drinkers on the terrace, when, unconsciously, she went over them "like a tank," as her mother said. She saw a man for each woman, and the youngest and handsomest of them appropriated by Billee Cator.

Billee's quick recovery from her angry surprise at the sight of her daughter had not been quick enough for Prim, who had been told too often, and stared at too much, not to understand that people thought her

lovely. She was not too much taken up with Gerry to miss the fierce glitter in Billee's blue eyes, or the knife edge on the bright voice that invited the babes from the woods to find crumbs in the dining room. She did not think her mother would be pleased to hear that Gerry wanted to marry her.

Cool and sweet from her bath, in her convent-made linen—high enough to cover Gerry's ring, which lay on her white young breast—Prim was brushing out the pounds of red hair at her dressing table, when Billee danced in, dressed for motoring, at half past eight in the morning.

"Allah, what weird garments!" She stopped to squint through her gilt eyelashes at Prim's modest dishabille. "Mornin', Prim! We've got to go up to town. Gerry's had a wire."

From the way Billee said it, she might have been married to him.

"Coming back to-night?" asked Prim, sweeping a red cloud down over her eyes.

"I may, by a late train." Billee began playing with the things on the dressing table. "I'm wondering if Gerry's really had a wire this morning, or an attack of nerves," she giggled. "Of course, with Gerry's millions, he's used to having girls hurl themselves at his head, but he must have found it embarrassing from my daughter. You didn't give me a chance to tell you last night, Prim."

"About the millions?" Prim lifted the cloud from a small smile. "He didn't tell me, either."

"Miss Phil Cator!" cried Billee, enchanted to meet her match. "Oh, Prim, you're so exactly like him! I wanted to find out if my Gerry had been flirting."

"I'm glad I'm like father," Prim said sweetly, meeting her mother's eyes in the glass.

"That's cryptic! Does it mean you're glad you're not like me? I can't stop to find out now—Gerry fumes when I keep him waiting. By-by, Prim! If Gerry makes me stop in town with him, I'll send the aunts down for you to flirt with."

"Good-by, mother," smiled Prim.

Billee's chill, bright laughter splintered on the closing door, and Miss Phil Cator burst into tears.

III

DE HAVEN, answering a general call to early breakfast, found the Ripley crowd

mustered on the terrace, and no Prim. A premonition of disaster seized him, as Billee—returning, offensively youthful and flirtatious, from the motherly shade to which he had conveniently dispatched her—danced to meet him.

"Here's my man! Now we can go in!"

De Haven furiously regretted his promise to Prim. People were always neatly coupled at Billee Cator's house parties. He was accustomed to being paired off with Billee, and had never thought about it; but there was something indecent, to him, in being publicly claimed by Billee Cator when he wanted to marry her daughter. He shrank distastefully from the possessive little hand that was slipped into his arm.

In the breakfast room, disaster fell upon him.

"Deviled kidneys for me, Gerry, and anything else sustaining for both of us. You're going to have the pleasure of running me up to town in your little car this morning."

"Town, on a heavenly day like this, Billee?" he asked, mechanically uncovering the dishes on the sideboard, and watching the door for Prim.

He had brought Billee down in his roadster. Prim wasn't going to town!

"Lawyers!" Billee waved a yellow envelope. "What does the Bible say? They load the people with burdens. People oughtn't to have to carry things in June. And it isn't as if they really needed me," she complained. "All I ever do is to sign 'Wilhelmina Cator, widow,' where they put their old fingers. I've pleaded with them to get it on a rubber stamp."

"Wilhelmina! Is that your name, Billee?" said De Haven stiffly. He noticed for the first time, as he took his seat at the table, that everybody was dressed for the road. "Are we all going up to help you sign to-day?"

"Sorry, Gerry—you'll have to pack your little kit bag after breakfast. I can't get down again till after Henley. Don't scowl at me, good people! You've all got places to go to," she said, addressing the table. "Have some breakfast sent up to Miss Cator," she added, over her shoulder, to a manservant.

De Haven set his cup in the saucer with a clatter.

"Isn't Miss Cator well?"

"Fast asleep, after sitting up to write love letters half the night," giggled Billee.

"She whipped them out of sight, Carol," she cried to a woman across the table, "with an angel's smile, exactly the way Phil did, whenever I caught him writing to those poor, stricken women of his!"

De Haven agitatedly crumbled his roll. He didn't believe a word of it! Billee always said anything she thought would be amusing. He believed Prim—the cool sweetness of her eyes, the shy touch of her lips—a man knows the difference! He *would* believe Prim, who said there had never been any one else; and yet an ugly little black snake wriggled among his white, flowerlike thoughts of her.

"More coffee, Gerry?"

He thought Billee Cator's little grin detestable. He thought it detestable in her to discuss her young daughter for the amusement of this blasé Ripley crowd. He thought Billee Cator altogether detestable when, without exchanging a word or a look with Prim, he had to drive her away from Ripley. He nearly told her so when, under the beeches where he had walked in that first rapture with Prim, Billee snuggled against him in the car, and launched a fresh installment of her second marriage serial.

"You won't say 'Alone at last!' or 'How I wish we were starting off like this on our honeymoon!' to me, will you, Gerry? Every other man who motors me out in the country carries those two remarks with spare parts and the petrol tin."

De Haven laughed, in spite of his savage temper.

"I'll keep them under the seat until I see signs of a breakdown."

"Don't!" she cried sharply. "I'm running away from it. Didn't you guess, Gerry? I saw you understood what happened to me yesterday, and it was dear of you to keep Prim away just at first; but to-day I couldn't go on. I made it up about the telegram from my lawyers. I had to come away. Prim brings it all back so! It's not only her looks—I joked about it at breakfast, because I'm not going to let my heart be broken a second time; but last night I couldn't help seeing that it's the same nature—Id, cynical, secretive—I've got to say it, Gerry—*slly*. The girl is her father all over again."

A chill crept into De Haven's fierce distaste for this confidence. He choked to break his promise to Prim, and to shut Billee up. At the same time, although he hated himself for it, he blamed Prim for

not being more open with her mother, and pitied Billee. He pressed the little hand tucked under his arm.

"Cheer up, Billee," he said.

"I know I'm silly, but I can't have Prim with me yet. I'm going to shut myself up in town and get over it. I shan't see anybody till Henley."

"But I want to see you before then, Billee," De Haven burst out. A week without Prim! He was turned out of Ripley, and Prim wasn't to be in town. "I must see you before then, Billee."

Mrs. Cator gave his arm a little squeeze.

"I'm glad I've got you, Gerry! Of course I'll see you; only I must have a little cry to myself. Ring me up in a day or two."

De Haven spilled her, thankfully, at her door, and headed his car for the nearest telegraph office, to wire his address to Prim.

Billee Cator, thinking better of her little cry to herself, danced to the phone, raked her list for people who were still in town, and got up her bridge parties for the week before Henley.

Prim's reply reached De Haven within an hour, and tormented him all day:

Address letters Mrs. Murray, Lavender Cottage, Ripley—my nanny, safe.

Safe! Safe from what? Why did Prim want to hide things? Why not play straight with her mother?

He was ashamed of not playing straight with Billee himself—of getting irritated, and of putting the blame on her. He couldn't hold with that business about Prim at breakfast, or in the car, but it was a dashed pity she couldn't be more open with her mother. Billee naturally exaggerated traits in Prim that brought back her dead husband. Phil Cator must have been a good deal of a beast!

Prim's first, darling love letter—the first she had ever written, he would swear—girlishly tender, a little shy, written "in our summerhouse, Gerry," revived De Haven like the cool, sweet breath of the white roses in the Ripley rose garden. His doubts and fears vanished. Prim was a white rose herself, Billee was a darling, they just didn't understand each other—that was the long and short of it!

He wouldn't ring Billee up. It would be better not to see her until he could clear things by telling her that he wanted to marry Prim.

He went out to buy Prim the most perfect pearl he could find, and bought Billee a diamond bangle, to cheer her up. When he got back, Fred Bantry called him on the phone, to ask if he happened to want, or knew anybody who wanted, a house boat for Henley, as Sir Thomas Agarde was offering the Water Baby.

De Haven jumped at it. He had spent week-ends with Sir Thomas on the Water Baby, the biggest and jolliest house boat on the river. In an hour the agreement lay on his desk, and he was writing his luck to Prim, and describing the Water Baby.

There was a big glass-fronted lounge that he could fill with white rosebushes, "to look like our summerhouse at Ripley." There was a huge saloon, with a regular ballroom floor. Fred Bantry, who was a good old sport, had offered to run down to Henley to have things tidied up, the flower boxes filled, and lanterns up. Fred would get all the necessary stuff on board for the feast, and would give out that he was going to open up the Water Baby on Regatta Day himself.

Everything was going top-hole, concluded Gerry. He'd got a peach of a band, he would make the whole thing wonderful for Prim, and three days before the regatta she must let him tell her mother.

It was Prim's next letter that sent him raging up and down his library, raving against Billee Cator. Prim wrote that it was not the slightest use to tell her mother before Regatta Day. Neither she nor her mother would be at Henley. Her mother was going away, she wouldn't say where, but Prim thought she was going abroad, because she'd had her steamer trunks sent up from Ripley. Prim was to stop at Ripley with the aunts, and her mother said she would send for her later.

"I'll wire you at once, Gerry darling," the girl promised, "the minute I know when I'm to be taken away, and where."

De Haven clutched the little snapshot of "Prim, belonging to Gerry," as if he held Prim herself away from Billee Cator. He had been pitying Billee, making excuses for her, and blaming Prim. He had thought it strange when she said that her mother spoiled things. Well, Prim was certainly right!

The thought stung him, like a wasp, that Billee Cator meant to spoil things. Ripley spoiled, town spoiled, Henley spoiled!

It stung deeper as he recalled and dis-

trusted what she had said about Prim—and always against Prim—to him, and before him. That business of calling him a dear for keeping Prim away from her at Ripley! She must have seen that they wanted to be together. Keeping Prim away from Billee? Billee was keeping Prim away from him! Taking her away—where?

A superstitious dread of Billee Cator shook him, as if she had an evil power to spirit Prim away to some place where he could never follow and find her. He rushed out, shouting for his car, and drove off in it, like a lunatic, to wire to Prim:

Don't stir from Ripley until you let me know where you are going. Can't you see we are spoiling things ourselves by not telling her before she goes? Wire permission immediately see her tonight. If turned down, will run away with you.

Prim's wire sent him off his head:

No, no, no—trust you not to tell—perfectly love run away.

De Haven read this, and fell on the phone. At least he would see Billee Cator, and would make her tell him where she was going.

"I'll twist it out of her!" he thought savagely, as he waited for the call to come through.

"Mrs. Cator is out of town, sir," the butler's expressionless voice answered, his eyes reading from the note against De Haven's name on Billee's list.

"Can you tell me where a letter would reach Mrs. Cator, or if she is returning this week?" asked De Haven, his own voice cracking.

The man could not say. He rang off, and Mrs. Cator, standing behind him, told him to get Mr. Bantry's number.

IV

EVEN at the telephone, Fred Bantry had his bitter-sweet smile for Billee Cator.

"All right!" he smiled, when he had listened to her message. "At nine o'clock."

At nine o'clock that evening he entered the peach-colored drawing-room and found her sitting cross-legged, like a small Turk, on her divan, looking as mischievous as a monkey.

"Confess you're bursting, Freddie!"

"I'm past that. This is the wreck."

"Sit down and smoke. Have a drink?"

"Thanks, not just now—I thirst only for information."

"Well, Freddie, I'm going to entertain you lavishly to-morrow. You're invited to breakfast and dinner with me."

"Why be mingy with lunch?"

"I'm going to lunch at Ripley, alone with Prim. Don't look as if it wasn't respectable, Freddie! The aunts are off for the day, and I want to be friends with Prim before I marry Gerry."

"It takes two—" began Bantry.

"Oh, I can win anybody when I want to," she interrupted, "and I want to win Prim. She amuses me just the way Phil did—she's so cool. I'm sorry I've got to take Gerry away from her. I shall give her some silk stockings and my best Ripley frocks."

Bantry burst out laughing.

"Oh, well, Freddie! You're not a woman. You have no really fine feelings. My Ripley best would heal any girl's broken heart, without silk stockings."

"Hasn't it occurred to you that De Haven could supply silk stockings and, we'll say, something modestly approaching your Ripley best, and spare Prim's heart?"

"My dear Freddie, if Gerry's almost unlimited capacity for supplying things hadn't occurred to me, I could give him up, quite easily, to Prim. You're really the only man I couldn't give up to any other woman."

"Thank you. How much?"

"Sixpence!" cried Billee promptly.

"That's all it will cost you for something I want. I want it more than anything on earth, Freddie, and you're the only person on earth who can get it for me."

"It's yours. What is it?"

"An agreement, signed, sealed, all in order, for letting me the Water Baby for Henley week."

Billee Cator had few surprises for Fred Bantry; but as the significance of her demand took slow shape in his mind, his jaw dropped. She knew, from him, that De Haven and the Castlereaghs intended to slip away from the Blue Bird, when things were quiet—about three o'clock in the morning, probably—and get down to the Water Baby, and that De Haven intended to sleep alone on the house boat. Billee Cator intended—

She was watching him, with her impudent little grin.

"I think I see," he said, very quietly. "You remember that Sir Thomas left it to me to sign De Haven's agreement, and that

I took De Haven's signature and the rent of a hundred guineas?"

"Well, that's all I want you to do for me—except taking the hundred guineas," she tittered. "I'll send it to you, though, Freddie, out of the pin money that Gerry allows—"

"We'll waive that," interrupted Bantry. "I'd rather like to hear where you think I'm going to get off after I've given you this bogus agreement."

"You said something about being detained on the Continent, didn't you, Freddie?" she asked, dimpling.

"I did, yes. I fancy I should find a spot outside the extradition laws healthier. Do you know this is a criminal's job that you're offering me?"

"Do you mind?" Mrs. Cator opened her eyes at him. "What's stealing?"

"I should class it among the virtues, on points," replied Bantry, keeping his temper. "So this is your no-risk idea, is it, Billee?"

"I don't see the least bit of risk in it. I'll have my agreement to show. If I choose to slip into my own house boat in the middle of the night, and give my friends a surprise on Regatta Day, that's entirely my own affair, isn't it?"

"It looks a little as if I might come into it," replied Bantry wryly. "However, let's get on with it. You propose to begin by surprising De Haven, I gather, when he is alone on the house boat?"

"Don't be dull, Freddie! I propose to begin by having the Castlereaghs surprise me, alone, on Gerry's house boat—sound asleep," she added crisply.

Bantry shook his head skeptically.

"I'm afraid you'll have to think of a way to account for De Haven's surprise."

"I'll let Gerry account for it himself, to the Castlereaghs, while I'm having a heart attack."

Bantry grimaced.

"And when your heart begins to beat again, you'll show your agreement, in self-defense." He waved his hands deprecatingly. "You won't wish to betray your gratification at being caught in a compromising position, will you? Well, say the three sportsmen retire discreetly, and remain discreet—where's your compromising position?"

"My dear, dull Freddie! You who know the Castlereaghs! You know they'd make a compromising position out of a pair

of dumb-bells discovered together, on one house boat, at three o'clock in the morning. They won't spoil one by *believing* in my agreement. They won't stop to see it. They'll race each other back to the Blue Bird to wake everybody up with the scandal. Discreet! The Castlereaghs were created for me, without discretion, by kind Heaven. Gerry will believe in my agreement, and he's the only person I need concern myself about."

"Quite so," said Bantry imperturbably. "And you feel quite satisfied that De Haven will make no move of his own?"

"I don't see that he's got a move, do you, Freddie? He'll know that the story will be all over Henley before breakfast. What can he do? What could any man do? What would you do yourself?"

"Well," said Bantry slowly, "I suppose I should go through with it; and when I'd got it over, I should start out after the unspeakable rotter who had played low down on a woman for a hundred guineas, and had forced me to marry her, when I wanted to marry her daughter. I should hunt him from Henley to hell. I should expect all your help, and Sir Thomas's, and Scotland Yard's, and the whole country would agree with me that he jolly well deserved the cat when he was caught!"

"You'll jolly well deserve the cat if you let yourself get caught!" retorted Mrs. Cator scornfully. "You'll have plenty of time to leave England—"

"Good God! Doesn't it occur to you that I might some time want to return to England? I *can* square myself with Sir Thomas—I've always meant to. If I can't put back all his money before he returns from Egypt, I can send him part of it with a 'tempted and fell' story, and the chances are nine out of ten that I can walk in some day and shake hands with him. Do you think any white man would touch my hand with a job like this sticking to it? You're asking me to roll into the mud for life, Billee! Your marriage to De Haven isn't going to pull me out."

"Freddie, I swear to you, it won't happen! Gerry won't want to make this public. We'll be married at once, and go abroad, and the thing will be forgotten in a week. Don't you see that in protecting me and himself, Gerry will have to protect you?"

"I'll protect myself, thanks," replied Bantry coldly. "No, Billee—I'd gag at a

thing like this, if it was your one way out. I'm sorry I can't help you to your twelve millions," he said, with his old smile for her; "but you can get out clean with half a million."

"Can I?" Mrs. Cator slipped from the divan and stood facing him. "I'll tell you *my* little 'tempted and fell' story, now, Freddie. I've used every penny of Prim's money. I've signed the other trustee's name a dozen times."

She shrugged impatiently as Bantry sprang up with a cry of dismay.

"I don't care what Gerry thinks of it," she went on. "I shall tell him as soon as we're married, and he'll have to put the money back, to keep his name out of the mud. You can see me crawling to him if he marries Prim, can't you?" She gave her chill, bright spurt of laughter. "Not for all his twelve millions! I've told you that he won't open his mouth about your part in this. If you care more for what he *thinks* about you than for saving me from being beggared and disgraced, when you're the only human being who can do it, we'll say good-by, Freddie, and a pleasant journey to you!"

"I shall not leave England in any case, now," replied Bantry gravely. "I want to think over what you've told me. I'll come to see you in the morning, and—"

"You needn't come to see me in the morning, or at all, unless you promise me to-night that you'll bring the agreement with you. I want to know to-night that I'm going to marry Gerry, because, if I'm not, I'm going out. Oh, you know I never bluff, Freddie!" she said, as Bantry involuntarily threw out his hand in sharp protest. "You know what I've always said—if things ever went dead against me, I wouldn't stop to pay. I don't care about rolling into the mud for life, either. One man's opinion of you isn't going to put you there, and you know it. I'm going upstairs." She slipped past his hand, and went to the door. "I'll come back in half an hour."

V

BANTRY heard her cross the hall and run lightly up the stairs. He walked up and down her beautiful, luxurious room, seeing her glittering little figure everywhere in it, like a hard, bright, precious stone in its costly setting.

Then he saw the room empty of her. He

knew he had listened to no idle threat from Billee Cator. She would not crawl. She never paid. She let others pay. He himself had paid with the hope and promise of his youth. He could pay again, if he liked, with what she had left him of his life—the frayed honor that he had wanted to keep outwardly presentable to the end.

He knew that to serve her own ends she would see him rolled into the mud, without pity or regret; and he accepted this without resentment. He was past resentment. There was in him a dearth of every living feeling, except the sentiment that chained him to Billee Cator.

For ten years he had believed that even his love for her was lifeless—torn out, with his heart, by the roots. He had regarded his cool, cynical affection for her as merely a bad habit, such as a man clings to, even after his craving for it is gone. Now, in the place where his heart had been, there was an intolerable ache, a passionate protest, a selfless need for Billee to live unhurt. He knew that his love for her had never died. He knew that he would pay for her again. After that, he thought, without emotion, he could go out himself.

Looking sixteen, and as if every one of the years had been summers, Billee Cator gave Fred Bantry his breakfast the next morning. After breakfast she signed "Wilhelmina Cator, widow," to an agreement with Sir Thomas Agarde, baronet, letting her the house boat Water Baby for Henley week, at a rent of one hundred guineas. The document was signed for Sir Thomas by his agent, "Frederick Livingstone Bantry, gentleman."

The two copies of the agreement were witnessed by Jordan Grant, butler, with their engrossed faces covered from his expressionless eyes by a sheet of blotting paper, and Bantry, who was a notary public, affixed the gaudy red seals. His smile was gently cynical as he signed "gentleman" after his dishonored name, and his hand was as steady as Billee Cator's.

She took the duplicate agreement from him and kissed it before she locked it into her desk. Then she tilted her little grin up to him over her shoulder.

"Shall I kiss you, too, Freddie?"

"Let me see—the last time you kissed me, Billee, you were a bride. Shall we allow the rite to remain sacred to the wedding ceremonial?"

"But you can't come to my wedding

this time, Freddie. You'll be running away!" Suddenly she sat down on the chair beside her desk. "I've just thought of it! I shan't have you, Freddie, when I'm married to Gerry."

Bantry laughed gently.

"You'll have a consolation prize of twelve millions, Billee."

"Yes, but—why haven't you got twelve millions? Or why aren't you Gerry? I could be perfectly happy with you and twelve millions, Freddie."

"I believe you," replied Bantry politely.

"Well, but I'm going to miss you frightfully, even with twelve millions. Do you realize that?"

"I hadn't, but I shall be glad to dwell on it, in exile."

Mrs. Cator looked thoughtfully at her bits of feet.

"I don't really see why you should remain in exile," she said, after a moment. "I intend to make Gerry very fond of me, Freddie. He'll deserve that, won't he?" She looked up brightly. "I believe I could persuade him, after a while, that you were really our good angel in disguise."

"I shouldn't count on it, Billee. I'm afraid most men, in De Haven's place, would find the disguise impenetrable. However, I'll live in hope." He picked up his hat and stick. "Dinner as usual?"

"Yes—half past eight, and you'd better come in your car. We can start after dinner and drive about until it's time to go down to Henley. I can't be seen eloping with you from my own house at midnight, Freddie." She danced out of the room before him, and turned at the door. "I don't believe I said 'thank you' for my little present, did I?"

"No," smiled Bantry, "but it only cost me sixpence."

Billee took in Bond Street before she left town. She bought Prim a dozen pairs of silk stockings, half a dozen pairs of smart shoes, and three model hats. One of the hats—a little white helmet—she couldn't give up.

"Perfect for my going away!" she thought, trying it on.

With a generous quail, which she greatly admired and enjoyed, she gave up to Prim, instead, some of the exquisite lingerie that she had bought for the same occasion, and bought some more—which she liked still better—for herself.

"It's quite good fun being unselfish and motherly," she approved herself, as she turned her car out of town, with the gifts that were to heal Prim's broken heart piled on the back seat. "I'll give Prim a good time—I shall be able to afford it!" she dimpled. "I'll marry her off well. There's really no reason why we shouldn't get on."

They got on amazingly at Ripley. Prim, having her mother's passion for pretty things, was overwhelmed by these unexpected riches. She sat swinging her stork's legs, rounded by nude silk stockings, from the arm of a couch, in Billee's room. Her feet were in smart white buckskin, and one of the model hats—the little white helmet—was on her red head.

Billee, cynically amused by her success as a heart healer, added frock after frock, from the Ripley best, to the pile on the couch, and watched wonder and delight growing in Prim's eyes.

"You're rather lovely, you know, Prim," she said graciously.

"Not as lovely as you are, mother. You're the loveliest person to look at that ever was!"

Billee, oddly delighted by praise from Prim, tittered.

"I was going to tell you that hat doesn't suit you, because I wanted it myself, but kind words are more than helmets. Here's a tailor to go with it." She tossed a white maroquin over to Prim. "Get into it, Prim—and this white jumper. Let me see if the skirt covers your knees. That's not too short, for a girl, this season. Lucky the sleeves are long! The others are all sleeveless, and you can get your string of bones into my middles-of-things, can't you?"

Prim laughed as Billee, with her yellow head cocked on one side, walked around her daughter, squinting through her gilt eyelashes, her little mouth buttoned up tight, with the absorbed interest of a child dressing its first big doll.

"Are you making me gorgeous to take me to town, mother?"

"Are you pining to be in town, Prim?"

"I'm pining to be at Henley."

Billee sat down recklessly on a dance frock.

"Henley! What put that in your head?"

"Why, Mrs. Butler!" Prim looked astonished. "She asked me with you, didn't she?"

"With me—yes," replied Billee, recovering from the shock; "but as I don't happen to be going to Mrs. Butler at Henley"—her lips quivered—"I declined for us both."

"Don't people ever write and change their minds, after declining invitations?"

"No—they change their minds and write," tittered Billee.

"Won't you change yours, mother?" asked Prim wistfully. "Won't you let me go up to town with you, and then go on to Henley?"

"Bismillah!" Billee sprang up with a little scream of laughter. "See what I've done to this frock!" She shook it out, hiding behind it. "It wouldn't be convenient to have you with me to-day, Prim. Gerry's going to meet me and see me out of town to-night. I shouldn't like to bother Mrs. Butler at the last minute, either. You'll have to amuse yourself the best way you can until you hear from me."

Prim received this in silence, watching the dance frock dancing in Billee's hands, and hearing the thread of laughter through her mother's voice.

The girl did not feel like laughing at Billee's lie about Gerry—for Prim knew that it was a lie. She had more than Gerry's superstitious dread of Billee Cator. She knew her mother's cleverness and ruthlessness. She had divined Billee's determination to marry Gerry and his millions on the morning when her mother, at Ripley, spoke as if she were already engaged to marry him.

Prim pondered what her mother's plan to part them might be. As her eyes wandered over her new finery, it fell on her like a crushing blow that all this was glittering dust thrown into her eyes to blind her. Her mother intended going abroad to arrange to clap her back into the convent, at Brussels, where such things as these were devil's livery.

From that man-proof prison Gerry could never rescue her. It was as hard to escape from it—Prim had tried and failed twice—as from any Devil's Island. Her heart swelled with fear and grief; but when Billee came out from behind the dance frock, Prim was smiling.

She was still smiling when Billee drove away from Ripley, waving her little hand gayly. She stood on the porch, still wearing the white tailor and the little helmet, to watch the car roll down the drive.

When it disappeared under the Ripley beeches, she turned into the house, fled through the long hall like a coursing hound, and took the stairs in leaps. Back in Billee's room, she quickly went about amusing herself the best way she could.

She packed all her new belongings, swiftly and neatly, into one of Billee's smart boxes, which she dragged from the box room. She laid the toilet articles from Billee's elaborate dressing table in the tray. She helped herself, from the *armoire*, to Billee's big white mouflon coat. Then she sat down at Billee's ornate writing table, and wrote on Billee's monogrammed and perfumed paper this little note to the aunts:

DEARS:

Mother came down this morning, so I've gone up to town. Love,

PRIM.

Then she ordered Billee's two-seater, to take her to the station. On the way she stopped to hug her nanny, over the gate of Lavender Cottage. At the station she sent back the car, and sent off a telegram, reply prepaid:

MRS. BUTLER, House Boat Firefly, Henley:

Will you have me without mother?

PRIMROSE CATOR.

Being one of those who can placidly wait, Prim waited two hours in the station, until the reply wire from Henley was handed to her:

MISS CATOR, Ripley Manor, Ripley:

Perfectly charmed—come at once.

LETTICE BUTLER.

VI

LATE in the day on which Prim left Ripley, Gerry De Haven sullenly motored down to Henley, to keep his hated engagement with the Trents, and to go through with the ghastly farce which was to have been Prim's wonderful supper dance. If he could have shaken off the Castlereaghs, he could have got out of the miserable business; but the Castlereaghs were hard burrs to shake off, and De Haven knew that they would stick fast to the notion that he was throwing up his surprise because Billee Cator was not coming to Henley.

De Haven was by no means ignorant of the fact that people wondered busily about himself and Billee Cator. Billee was always retailing, as the richest thing in life, gossip that speculatively coupled their names. Now that he was engaged to Prim, he would put an end to such nonsense.

In spite of his youth, Gerry did not invite open discussion of his private concerns; but the Castlereaghs did not stand on invitations. To borrow George du Maurier's description of the human limit of impertinent curiosity, they would not have hesitated to ask the Queen of Spain to show her legs. The vulturous expectancy of a Castlereagh settling to a feast was a spectacle not to be borne by De Haven in his present state. The mere sight of them promised to be as much as he could stand.

Except for their caddish curiosity and their cackling tongues, however, they were a couple of good sportsmen. Moreover, each had asked a best girl down for the regatta, expecting to entertain them on De Haven's house boat; so Gerry was roped hand and foot to the hollow festival out of which Billee Cator had kicked the bottom. He would have liked nothing better, now, than to scuttle the Water Baby and watch it sink with Billee Cator on board.

Billee Cator! He hated her and was terrified of her. He could not make her out. He could not find her out. He had shattered even the classic calm of Billee's perfect butler by persistent inquiries over the phone, and by insistent demands at her door, up to ten minutes before leaving town. He had bribed that magisterial insolence with a five-pound note to wire him news of Mrs. Cator's return.

Billee Cator! When he took the road to Henley, her sinister little figure danced before his car, jumped on the bonnet, riding backward, to grin her awful little grin at him through the wind screen, mocking him, defying him to find out where she was going to hide Prim.

Billee Cator! Those were the first words he heard at Henley, when Mrs. Trent—tiresome woman!—and her party—set of deadly bores!—started on him with—

"Billee Cator's not coming, Gerry."

As if he didn't know it!

"Billee Cator's gone away. Do you know where? Isn't it intriguing?"

De Haven was not intrigued—he was raving mad to know where Billee Cator had gone. It made him homicidal to be asked if he knew.

He saw the Castlereaghs—stuffed with something, as he could tell by their bulging eyes—hurrying on the Blue Bird, leering and making silly signs, when they saw him, to remind him of what he'd got to go through with to-morrow. Frank began to

disgorge to the Blue Birds, who flocked to his eager call, but Nat seized De Haven's arm, pulled his friend over to the rail, and nearly lost his life by beginning:

"I say, Gerry! Do you know where Billee Cator's gone? Toddled off somewhere on her own, so the girl says, but she doesn't know where. She spat it out before all of us that Billee didn't tell her. Rip-ping girl—seen her? Puts it all over Billee. Tall, red hair—"

By this time De Haven knew that the world had come to an end and the Thames had stopped flowing. The deck of the Blue Bird had dropped from under him, and he was hurtling, head downward, through illimitable, star-pricked ether, arm in arm with a silly-looking ghost who had the bulging eyes of Nat Castlereagh.

Frank Castlereagh's voice reached him from a star, millions of miles away:

"Daughter doing top-hole duty for Billee over on the Firefly—tall girl, lovely eyes, red—"

De Haven's head hit something, and he came crashingly alive again. Bands were playing him back to earth—the great, glad, glorious green earth! The big, bright, beautiful sun was shining out of the blue, blue, heavenly heavens! The placid Thames was flowing again, and he was on it—how he got there he didn't know—punting like a maniac for the Firefly.

He stabbed another punt. Screams came out of it, and a wrathful voice:

"Here! Look out for yourself! Do you own this river?"

"Yes!" yelled De Haven, shooting by to Prim.

Prim saw him coming and leaned to him, cool, white, sweet, unearthly beautiful.

Mrs. Butler, talking to the girl—who was so like that saint on earth, Phil Cator, that she had first seen her through tears—turned quickly to see who had brought into Prim's eyes that look which, long years ago, before the coming of Billee, she had seen dawning in Phil Cator's eyes, for herself. When she saw that it was Gerry De Haven, on whom Billee Cator's boastful hopes were set, a rapt expression, as if she were saying her prayers, came over Lettice Butler's face.

She was a dark, still woman, who had married at thirty, a year after Phil Cator died, and had outlived all her emotions except her hatred of Billee Cator, which was deathless. She watched the meeting be-

tween Gerry De Haven and Billee Cator's daughter; and when they moved away together from the Firefly crowd, as they had moved away together from the Ripley crowd, she firmly and frankly kept other people away from them.

"They're in love—let them alone," she said. "They're too beautiful!" In her heart she vowed: "Please God, Billee shan't spoil this!"

"Prim!" Gerry was saying ecstatically. "How did you get here? I'm off my head! Can't I kiss you, darling? In here—oh, hang, why aren't we on our own house boat? Here, quick, Prim—nobody's looking. Oh, darling, tell me about it! How did your mother come to change her mind? How long will she let you stop?"

"She left it to me, at the last minute," smiled Prim. "She didn't say how long I could stop."

"How jolly of her! Isn't it a beastly shame we aren't on the same boat? I'll have to leave you in a few minutes, darling, but I'll get down again after dinner, if I can get off bridge, and I'll have you every minute to-morrow. I'll swim across from my boat early in the morning. There's the old Water Baby, straight across—see the glass lounge? I say, darling, can you swim? You can? Well, get up early, before anybody else, and come for a swim with me."

"I'd love it, but oh, Gerry, I didn't bring a suit!"

"Pinch one from the drying cubby. Down here—I'll show you. Here you are—this door—dozens of 'em! I say, darling, this is heaven! Come inside and let me kiss you!"

They went to heaven and kissed, like angels, with dank clouds of swimming suits flapping against their bare heads and necks. Then they returned to the world, beatified.

"What an ass I was to go to the Trents! I might just as well have come to Lettice. If only we had known!"

"Wouldn't Mrs. Trent exchange you for somebody of Mrs. Butler's?" suggested Prim. "Mrs. Trent would be welcome to that red man, over there, who keeps on staring at us."

"Where? I'll hold him under water till he forgets it!"

De Haven stared down the red man, who retired in disorder. Then he took Prim's hands.

"I've got to leave you now, darling, but, Prim, I can't let you go away from me. I believe I'll run away with you from here, while I've got the chance!"

"Oh, Gerry!" Prim clung to his hands. "Please, please, please!"

This was the idea under Prim's white helmet when she ran away from Ripley. The only thing that troubled her was how to bring it about without betraying her mother. Prim's pride in her own was fierce—like her father's. Phil Cator had gone down smiling, cherishing his callous little wife before the world, shielding her to the last. Prim's desperate cry to Gerry to keep their secret, at Ripley, had been torn from her by the fear that her mother's jealous vanity would part them; but she had let him think her unjust, rather than explain how her mother spoiled things.

Mrs. Butler had taken it for granted that the girl came to Henley with Billee's consent, and Prim let Gerry think so, too, giving him a little push in that direction, rather than have him suspect that her mother was plotting to part them. It would settle Prim's problem, if only Gerry would run away with her before her mother found her out. The suggestion had come from him, quizzically; and now, Prim thought, it was up to her and Heaven to see that he carried it out.

VII

It was not a young crowd that Lettice Butler had got down to Henley for the regatta. Lights were out everywhere on the Firefly, except in Prim's room, by half past twelve. The girl slipped out on deck, picking up a big man's big coat as she passed through the saloon, to cover her white dinner frock, and snuggled down in a deep chair, to look on at the fun across the river.

The Firefly belonged to the owner of a big estate, who was away for the summer. She lay lonely at her moorings, with private river frontage stretching away from either end of her. All the music, lights, and gay noises of night life on the Thames during Regatta Week came from the big house boats moored at the opposite bank, and from the small craft flashing up and down the river.

The dark silent bulk of the Water Baby was cut out against a white stretch of sparsely shaded road behind it; but the moon made a subdued gayety of the flower

boxes on the roof, silvered the closely curtained windows, and looked into the uncurtained glass front of the lounge and at her own face reflected in a mirror that covered the whole of the back wall.

Prim could see, through the glass, the shadowy groups of palms and the ghostly shapes of white wicker furniture. She thought happily of Gerry's loving wish to fill the lounge with white rosebushes, to make it like their summerhouse at Ripley. She took Gerry's ring from her chain and put it on her finger.

The July night was almost as white as day. Prim could plainly distinguish faces in the groups on the decks of the house boats. She could see the colors of girls' frocks and the sparkle of jewels. She hoped to catch a glimpse of Gerry and the Castlereagh boys stealing on the Water Baby.

It would be a long time to wait till three o'clock, and it would hardly be worth while to go to bed then, for she was going to get up at five, to swim with Gerry; but it was lovely here in the moonlight, and she was as comfortable as a kitten in the big chair, lost in the man's big coat.

The music had stopped and the lights gone out on the house boats, one by one, and the last small craft had flashed up and down the river and disappeared, when a little covered car ran out of the shadows into the white stretch of road on the opposite bank, and vanished behind the Water Baby.

Prim, idly interested, watched to see it pass on beyond the house boat. It did not pass on.

She jumped out of her chair and ran to the rail. Gerry and the Castlereagh boys must have been squashed into that little car, and were getting on the Water Baby. She watched the windows for a gleam of light; but they were working in the dark, keeping their secret well. They had managed it early, for it wasn't two o'clock.

She waited till the little car ran out again from behind the house boat, and made off the way it came. The Castlereagh boys had evidently gone back, and Gerry was alone on the Water Baby. Prim wondered if he was looking out, from behind one of those curtains, over to the Firefly, and saying good night to her. She stretched out her hands, her face very lovely in its young tenderness, and said good night to him.

The moon had climbed the mirrored wall

and hung low above the Water Baby. The glass front of the lounge, reflecting the fretted silver of the river, spread like a huge sheet of crinkled tin foil shaken lightly by a wind. Prim's smiling eyes were fixed on it, when its mystery was shattered in a sudden blaze of light that was caught up by the big mirror, repeated, and flung out in a wide, white, shivering oblong, floating on the silver current of the river.

Palms in brass and porcelain pots, white chairs and tables and settees, the gilt-framed mirror and pictures on the walls, bright cushions and gay rugs, sprang out of the shadows into clear, familiar shapes and colors. Among them, clear and familiar as the rest, was the little figure, ravishingly undressed, of Billee Cator.

Billee stood near an open doorway, her little body stiff with fright, her small Cupid's head thrown up, startled, her eyes wide and staring, her impudent little mouth open. Her little hand, flashing with jewels, rested on a light switch on the wall, near the door. Her bare, childish throat and shoulders rose from a pink foam of ninon slipped over her exquisite little sleeping suit and washing against her bare legs and ankles and around her feet. She looked like a lost, lovely, frightened sprite, floating on a rose-colored cloud into some strange, alarming place.

Suddenly, startlingly, as it had flashed into view, like a picture on a screen, the scene was shuttered by the huge sheet of crinkled tin foil shaken by a wind. The river bore its fretted silver between its banks. The big, round, holiday moon hung over the Water Baby and looked serenely down on Primrose Cator, lying on the deck of the Firefly, with the collar of the man's big coat pulled up over her eyes.

The *Sherlock Holmeses* who catch crooks as other men catch fish instruct admiring *Watsons* that the master criminal is often obliging enough to bait his own hook, and to be netted in his wanton vanity or caught on the one incredibly stupid little blunder that hangs on the tail of the subtlest plan.

When that exquisite little criminal, Billee Cator, set out to crib Gerrard De Haven's millions, she made the one incredibly stupid little blunder that wrecked her subtle plan. Ravishingly undressed for her compromising situation, with nothing to do but to play at being sound asleep, she switched off the light in her room. Then, finding that she had left on the light in the

big saloon, she ran out to turn it off, without switching the light in her room on again.

To reach the switch in the saloon she had to climb on a couch. Jumping down, she took three steps, and lost her sense of direction in the dark. She groped for the couch again, climbed on another one, felt on the wall for a switch that wasn't there, and jumped down again in the darkness. She fumbled the length of the saloon, on the wrong side of it, bumping into things, getting nervous, desperate.

At length, her groping hands passing over the panels of a door, she opened it, sure of finding a light switch near it, on the wall inside. She found and turned the switch as she went through, and stepped into a blinding bath of electric light.

She was frightened out of her senses to find herself standing between a mirrored wall and the uncurtained glass front of the lounge, visible to any one passing on the river or on the opposite bank, and, in that white glare, recognizable to any one who knew her. She stood, gaping, for the best part of a minute, before her wits came back. Then she switched off the light, backed out, closed the door, and went groping again in the darkness, until she stumbled into her room.

In two seconds, with the light on and the door shut, she recovered from her fright in a fit of titters. Whoever might have seen her, it couldn't have been Gerry and the Castlereaghs. True, to save De Haven time and noise getting into the saloon, Fred Bantry had arranged to leave the deck doors on the river side unlocked, the night before the regatta; but if the three men had got as far as the deck, thought Billee, they would have got inside by this time. Allah be praised! Her luck was better than she deserved, and no harm had been done.

VIII

As a matter of fact, the harm that was done on the deck of the Firefly was such as angels weep for.

Whatever Primrose Cator had thought of her mother, she had never thought anything like this. She had never given much thought to things like this. Her mother was vain, selfish, cold, deceitful, flirtatious. She had broken the heart of the father Prim adored, had chilled the girl's own heart, had aged her outlook, had robbed

her of the joys of childhood; but, with that singular and peculiarly feminine application of the word to chastity of the body, Prim had always believed that her mother was "good."

It was a thousand pities, in that moment of paralyzing terror and shame, that Prim could not have known, for the comfort it would have been to her, that she was right. There was just that physical virtue in Billee Cator. She sold her smiles, but not her kisses. She made men pay heavily for their admiration, and gave nothing in return. Her cold, careful little brain had never admitted a lover to her life. Not for De Haven's millions would she have done that which, to gain possession of his millions, she was eager to appear to have done.

Prim only knew that her mother had come secretly, at night, in the little car, to Gerry's house boat, had sent the car away, and was waiting, exquisitely undressed, for Gerry to come to her. In its immensity of shame, this single thought filled her bruised young mind as the single figure of her mother, in that place of light and glass, filled her aching eyes.

Agonizingly, as sensation returns after a numbing blow, other thoughts began to intrude darkly on this thought, and other figures to gather menacingly about that lovely, helpless, frightened little figure of her mother.

Uncle Freddie, as Prim called Bantry, must have told her mother that Gerry meant to sleep on the Water Baby, and she had come, thought Prim, to make this appeal of her beauty, of her love, and of the opportunity, expecting that Gerry would come to the house boat alone.

To Prim, Gerry had no part in the scorching picture that held her eyes and her brain, in the tearless dark, behind the collar of the big coat. Prim's was the perfect love that casteth out fear, suspicion, and jealousy. Gerry was hers. He was here with her, suffering, hurt, and ashamed by what her mother had done.

Then she saw them together, with the consequences of her mother's madness hurrying to overwhelm them both. Something deep and womanly stirred in Billee Cator's young daughter, to save them. Something gave her piercing vision, and called her from the lethargy of shame and grief to swift, selfless action.

She sprang up—shedding the big coat and leaving it where it fell—and sped down

the deck to the drying cubby where she had gone to heaven with Gerry. She shut herself in. She tore off her white dinner frock, tumbling it on the floor, with lingerie, shoes, stockings, and the pins from her hair on top of it. Standing on her stork's legs, stripped to her skin, white as a moonbeam, she pulled somebody's damp swimming suit over her red head.

Then she padded back along the deck on her bare feet. She climbed the rail and balanced her long rake of a body, with lifted arms and pointed hands lightly touching above her head. In an arc as true and slender as the sickle moon, she dived, straightened her length above water, cut it clean as a knife blade, and the river took her, with a soft, kissing splash.

She came up a dozen yards out from the Firefly, and shook her hair back from her eyes. She thrust her head—all but the white tip of her nose—under water, and struck out upstream, to cheat the current and to make her landing sure. On she went, swimming the South Sea Islander's rolling, overhand stroke, with the backward thrust and the forward leap that take the human body through the water with its least possible resistance, and its nearest possible approach to the speed of the torpedo.

A rope hung, by Heaven's loving kindness, from the deck of the Water Baby on the river side, dabbled in the water. Prim swarmed it, swung herself over the rail, and stood on the deck to breathe and listen.

Not a sound, not a sign of life, not a glimmer of light on the house boat, from end to end!

Prim ran forward, wringing the water from her hair, past the glass front of the lounge to the saloon doors, saying a little prayer under her breath:

"Please, dear, dear God, let me find the way in!"

Ask, and ye shall receive. The doors slid noiselessly open under the girl's hand. Stopping to locate the light switch on the wall, by the light of the moon; she stepped into the saloon, closed the doors noiselessly, switched on the light, and took her bearings.

Only two doors leading from the saloon were closed, and the nearer, Prim knew, must open into the lounge. She switched off the light, and silent, sure as a cat in the dark, made straight for the other. She opened it without a sound, and felt for a light switch on the inside wall.

Before she turned on the light, she said, in the voice with the little husky thrum in it that got inside Billee Cator's spine:

"Don't scream, mother!"

Billee Cator did not scream. She rose stiffly from her pillows, as if pulled up by a string, bereft of all her senses but her sight, and not believing in that.

Of the two, Prim looked the culprit. She leaned, trembling, against the closed door, her slender young body sleek in the wet swimming suit of black silk, her white arms and legs gleaming from the water, her hair dark and drowned, her colorless face drooping, with eyelids down. She struggled with a terrible need to sink through the floor from her mother's eyes. She was as cold as death.

Billee's eyes hardened on her daughter as she realized that this was no waking dream, but living disaster. She found her voice—a voice cold and wicked as biting steel, with a hum in it like a steel blade swinging to strike.

"Wherever you came from, go back! Go back instantly!"

She sprang out on the floor, the pink pyjamas shivering with the cold fury of the little body under them, her blue eyes black, her lips stiff.

"Go back! Do you hear me, Prim? Go instantly!"

"Mother, I saw you from the Butlers' house boat, across the river. You—I don't understand. It's for—for fun, isn't it? But Gerry isn't—isn't coming here alone. Please dress before they come! I'll think of something to say. I thought you—you wouldn't want them to know that you—you played this—this joke on Gerry. I came to take care of you, mother!"

Prim had not raised her eyes. Her voice was a shamed whisper, and her anguish showed haggard through her pitiful pretending. She gave her mother all the time she needed to get her wits back and change her tactics.

"I'll have to take care of you. I think I'll have you locked up for a lunatic," said Billee Cator, with her chill, bright laugh. "I don't know what you're talking about, but you sound mad. What do you mean about a joke with Gerry, and who are 'they'? I don't think that Gerry and 'they,' whoever 'they' may be, are coming to my house boat at this unearthly hour of the morning!"

"Mother, don't stop to talk! Please

dress! This is—" Prim could not say it. "Everybody says this is Gerry's house boat, and he's coming on board to-night, with the Castle—"

"Nonsense!" Billee cut her off, and, though time was short and worth a million a minute, she could not help trying to set another stone on the wall between Gerry and Prim. "Gerry gave up his agreement. We are going to be married and go away after the regatta. I changed my mind about Henley, to please him. I had to have some place. I had declined all my Henley invitations."

Billee hastily opened her dressing bag, on the locker, tore out her bogus agreement, and thrust it into Prim's hands.

"Satisfy yourself! There's my name, and Uncle Freddie's. Now you can tell Mrs. Butler, or whoever told you that this is Gerry's house boat, that it's mine. Please go, and let me get back to bed."

Prim held the paper in her hands. She was bewildered between what she took for truth and what she knew for lies.

For the first time, she looked at her mother. The troubled question in the girl's eyes exasperated Billee—and, even more, the fact that Prim did not move.

"Will you go?" she asked furiously, her voice humming and cutting again. "Gerry motored me down late to-night, and I'm tired out. Hortense will be here in the morning, and I want to sleep until she is here to attend to me. To-morrow I shall expect you to explain how you come to be at Henley without my permission."

She glanced at her traveling clock on the locker, and stamped her little bare foot savagely.

"Go! Do you understand what I'm saying to you? Go instantly! I don't want you here!"

"Why, mother?"

Why? Her plans foiled, her twelve millions wrested from her, her one chance to bind De Haven wrecked, if he found Prim here! And Prim standing here, refusing to go, cold, still—looking at her with those eyes of Phil Cator's, and asking her, in that voice of Phil Cator's:

"Why?"

How many times, when she had brought some carefully arranged plan of hers almost to perfection, Phil, with that cold look in his eyes, had looked through it, with that grave question in his voice, and had asked her:

"Why?"

As in such scenes with Prim's father, when she found she could not move him, so now with Prim, Billee Cator flew to pieces. She flung her cold caution to the winds of fury.

"Because I don't intend that you shall take Gerry De Haven away from me! Because I intend that he shall ask me to marry him to-night!"

Prim, looking afraid of her mother, re-treated to the locker. Billee followed, thrusting her distorted little face, suddenly grown ugly and old, close to her daughter, and raved her whole dishonorable story—her theft of Prim's money and her plan to save herself by marrying De Haven. She told how she had got the bogus agreement from Bantry, and how she planned to compromise herself before the Castlereaghs. She declared her intention to destroy herself, if her plan was interfered with.

Finally, spent, broken, beaten by something more than the shame and terror in Prim's eyes—something cold and unconquerable which, in the end, had always cowed her in Phil Cator's eyes—she flung herself on Prim, sobbing, pleading, praying with her, crawling to her, to give up Gerry De Haven.

Prim shrank away from her, but not violently, and sat, very white and still, looking down at the agreement.

"Mother, I'm going to tear this up."

She tore the tough paper across, and, as Billee dragged at her hands, she stood up and finished it.

"May I put this on? I'm cold."

She wrapped herself in Billee's bath gown, and sat down beside her mother, who had subsided, moaning, on the locker.

"Please listen, mother. I've thought of something we can do. Dress as quickly as you can, and lend me something to put on. I'll help you first."

Prim picked up Billee's things, and began to dress her, Billee protesting weakly, whimpering and wringing her little hands.

"You can't come between Gerry and me, mother. We love each other, and we've been engaged ever since Ripley. You don't want him, or any one, to know about to-night. Gerry thinks you'll be pleased about us. He wanted to tell you before Henley, and ask you to give a dance for me on his house boat to-morrow night. Can't you say that I told you, and that you are pleased, and that you've come down to

surprise him, when he and the other boys come and find us both here? For your own sake, mother, not for mine," added Prim without bitterness. "Then, when the boys have gone, I can swim back. You needn't be afraid I'll never tell Gerry anything. Can't you do that?"

Billee did not answer. As Prim finished with her, she reached for her *ninon* negligee and slipped it on. She got up, took some clothes from the chest of drawers, and tossed them on the locker. Then she began to touch up her face at the glass.

Prim, blue with cold, her teeth chattering, rubbed down and dressed hurriedly. She slipped her long feet as far as they would go into Billee's little pink mules, and came up behind her mother at the glass, wrapping her damp hair about her head, and looking for something to fasten it.

Billee handed her a jeweled poniard pin.

"Here!" she said ungraciously, and watched Prim in the glass. "That's the only frock I brought for to-morrow, but you might as well take *everything* from me!"

Above her bright reflection, Prim, in the white frock, her face whiter under the heavy bands of hair darkened by the water, looked washed away. Her eyes were thoughtful.

"I didn't know Gerry had so much money," she said suddenly. "Twelve millions! I suppose he'll make a very good settlement on me, won't he, mother?"

"Bismillah!" The ghost of the little grin played with the corners of Billee's mouth. "You're not so blindly in love with him, then? Gerry will probably settle a trifling million or so on you, and you'll have a handsome allowance, besides."

"A million! That's lots more than father had, isn't it? And I can do as I like with it, can't I? I mean that I could put back all father's money, yours and mine, without telling Gerry, couldn't I, mother?"

Billee arrested her powder puff on its way to her nose, and stared over it into Prim's serious eyes in the glass.

"Yes—if you like," she said breathlessly.

"And with all that, there'd be enough to save Ripley, too, wouldn't there? And to have everything just as it was when you had father, wouldn't there, mother? And then—"

Prim hesitated.

"And then—what, Prim?" asked Billee, her little face working strangely.

"Then we'd be happy," replied Prim.

Billee dropped the powder puff, whirled around from the glass, and caught Prim's face between her bits of hands.

"Prim! *Are you fond of me?*"

"Yes," said Prim, smiling her father's smile.

IX

DE HAVEN, a changed man, returned to make himself agreeable to that nice woman, Fannie Trent, and her jolly crowd on the Blue Bird. He leered and made silly signs at the Castlereaghs, to remind them of the jolly racket coming off on the jolly old Baby to-morrow. He joked about Billee Cator's vanishing trick, asked everybody where they supposed she'd got to, and submitted heroically when he couldn't get off bridge and couldn't go back to Prim.

It looked as if the Blue Birds were going to lark about all night. Just as they were off to roost, some silly ass proposed a swim at two o'clock in the morning, and the whole flock took to the water like ducks.

It was three before the plotters forgathered on the silent deck.

"Go on, you two," said Nat. "I'm going to sneak a bottle."

"Plenty of it on the Baby. Old Fred got in all sorts of stuff for to-morrow," said De Haven, pulling him along and jeering fat Frank, who suggested that they might as well punt down. "Oh, let's fire up the launch and make all the noise we can! Come on, old hippo! You can tell Henley about it in the morning."

They got safely down, and on board of the Water Baby, without telling Henley about it; but the hippo had a sounding step.

"Don't make all that row, ass!" hissed Nat.

The next moment Nat himself skidded in a pool of water from Prim's dripping hair, and announced their arrival like a ton of coal.

"Been swabbing decks, or some funny fool has climbed on from the river," he spluttered, as the other two, snorting like silly schoolboys, hauled him up and along to the saloon doors.

"Shut up and get inside," said De Haven. He pushed them into the saloon, closed the door, and felt for the familiar switch. "What do you say to it? Great, isn't it? Lots of room to jazz. Come out of that! You'll light up the river!"

He pulled Nat away from the fatal lounge, threw his suit case through an open door, and leaned his big shoulders against the closed door next to it, chuckling delightedly.

"We gave them the slip all right, what? We'd take a lot of finding. If you two watch your step going off, I'll bet not a soul gets on to this!"

His satisfied chuckle smothered Billee Cator's irrepressible titter behind the closed door. Prim smiled palely at the sound of Gerry's happy voice. She sat listlessly on the locker, shivering a little, and watching Billee, as a mother going alone through deep waters watches her unconscious child at play.

Billee Cator's tears were always quick to dry. They rolled down her cheeks like little glass beads, and their traces could be dusted off with a powder puff. Her tempers popped and fizzed like aerated waters from a bottle, and flattened as soon as they were poured out. She had raged and wept to see her gilded hopes in ruins; but soon she climbed on the wreck and found the prospect delightful.

Things, thought Billee Cator, might have been worse—Gerry's millions in the family, Prim carrying an open purse, Phil's thousands tossed back into her lap, and Ripley hers without worry.

"Everything just as it was when you had father," Prim had said, and that, with Prim so much like her father, meant everything she wanted. She would be care-free, looking ten years younger than her thirty-four. Prim, who went over her like a tank, would be married. Freddie—she hadn't seen how she was going to get on without Freddie—would be back in his old place.

This reminded her that she must catch Freddie with an early wire before he ran away, and get him down to Henley to-morrow.

Come.—BILLEE.

She dimpled—that would bring Freddie back from the grave! She would amuse him with all this.

Then, again, that soft, smiling "yes" of Prim's—it was as if Billee had picked up her hollow little heart, like a shell, and held it to her ear, and listened to a strange, sweet murmuring. Decidedly things might have been, and perhaps ought to have been, worse for Billee Cator!

"Quick, Prim!" Billee danced over to

her and caught her hands. "They've gone to hunt supper. Allah be praised! I'm starving. Come, quick—we'll hide in that lounge place, and jump out on them."

"No—from here."

Prim caught her mother as she switched off the light and opened the door. It would take Gerry and all his white rosebushes to crowd a certain little figure in pink pyjamas out of "that lounge place," for Prim.

She stood behind her mother, looking over Billee's head through the door, which was set ajar. Her eyes were wistful. She was cold, weary, and a little frightened still, but it would be all right with her when she saw Gerry.

She saw him, big, brown, joyous, leading the hunters in with spoils—a gilt-necked bottle under each arm—and helping the others to lump the table in the happy, higgedly-piggledy fashion of hungry men. Then Gerry took the top of it, where he could look, through curtained windows and paneled doors, across the river to the Firefly. He opened the wine, filled the glasses, and lifted his own over his head.

"The only girl!"

"I'll respond to that, Gerry!"

De Haven stood, a man of stone, with the wine from the tilted glass running down his leg.

Billee Cator! He saw her, as if by enchantment, glittering out of the darkness, whirling toward him on a pink, foaming, jewel-girdled wave. Her corn-colored head was as bright as gold, her jewel eyes were squinting between her gilt eyelashes, her little jeweled hands were fluttering, as she came across the big saloon. His superstitious dread of her returned. She looked like a shining spirit of evil.

A fearsome fantasy began playing with his brain. Was this Billee Cator, dazzling from his eyes that tender vision of the girl he loved, sweetly asleep on the Firefly? Was Prim there, across the river? Or was this Prim, here on the Water Baby, witched by Billee Cator into her own glittering, sinister little shape? Was Prim's lovely smile for him locked forever behind Billee Cator's awful little grin? He stared at the approaching figure in mad terror.

The inflamed Castlereaghs rose on flapping wings to the scent of scandal. Their bulging eyes pained Billee. They were born for her compromising situation, and were wasted on this innocence of Gerry's and Prim's. She sparkled with naughty

mischief, plotting devilry to cheat them, and hoping that Prim wouldn't spoil it by appearing too soon. Why hadn't she thought to tell Prim to hide until she was called?

But a little god—little, but greater than Billee Cator's gods—had begun to pity poor Prim. Something stronger than superstitious dread of Billee Cator called voicelessly to De Haven, across the big saloon, to lift his eyes from the glittering impudence that was dancing into his arms and turn them to a cool, white, smiling, trembling sweetness that was leaning to him from an open doorway.

"Prim!"

The dishes danced, the glasses rang, the wineglass in De Haven's hand followed the wine, tinkling. The palms on the table clapped their leaves. The big saloon sang and shook. The Water Baby rocked as if she were laughing.

Billee Cator danced away from De Haven's flying leap to Prim, and danced back, hand in hand with her daughter, to meet him. The Castlereaghs took it in with open beaks.

"She handed the girl over to old Gerry like a prize packet," they told the Blue Birds, later. "You could have knocked us both over with a feather!"

A babe could have knocked De Haven over with less. He stood between them, his six feet of whipcord all unstrung, his honest face shining, his clear eyes looking love, joy, and wonder from one to the other, his big brown hands closing, trembling, on a hand of each.

"Prim! Billee! Prim!" he stammered huskily.

"He doesn't know which of us he wants. He wants us both, really!" Billee spurted titters. "I'll give you up, Gerry. I live to make others happy. Now, somebody please feed me!"

"Billee, wait!" De Haven swung her off the floor. "Billee, you darling!" he choked, and kissed her.

"Wasn't I clever to think of this surprise? Put me down on a chair, Gerry, next to the chicken pâté. I'm not in love, but I don't mind being engaged over the regatta," she told the gaping Castlereaghs, as De Haven pushed her chair up to the table. "You two sheiks can draw lots for me, and I don't care who wins. I shall take the one who gets first to me with those sandwiches!"

The Castlereaghs fought for the plate. De Haven turned eagerly to Prim. She had kept close to him, her fingers working with a bit of his sleeve, while her mother "made believe."

"Come by me, darling! Why, Prim, you're cold!"

"She's been in the water," cried Billee.

"She swam across from—"

"Darling, you didn't? Alone?" De Haven paled. "Come and have a little brandy. I've got some in my case, in one of these rooms—where is it? Here, come inside, Prim—you're like ice. I'll give you a good stiff peg. I'd have been off my head, if I'd known! Couldn't you get a boat, darling?"

Prim's lips quivered, but De Haven was working hurriedly, unstrapping his case, to get his flask, and not waiting for her answer. He poured a reckless peg and held the cup to her lips.

"Get it down neat, Prim. No—all of it. If anything had—" He threw down the cup and caught her in his arms. "Prim, Prim!"

Prim held fast to him and to the comfort of him. She felt his strength closing her in, his love keeping her. The healing tenderness of his kisses on her eyes shut out visions. She heard him saying loving, foolish things that banished terrible thoughts, and scolding her softly as his cheek touched her damp hair. He told her that she was a mad darling to do this to surprise him, but he loved her more dearly than ever for doing it. He said that it was the most wonderful surprise in the world, that it didn't seem like the world to him to-night, but heaven.

Prim knew that he was perfectly, unsuspectingly happy, that his faith was un-

harmd, that his heaven was without a cloud. The tears that had flooded her young breast, the bitter waters of fear, grief, and shame, ebbed gently, painlessly, back to deep, secret sources, and her heart was young and glad again.

De Haven drew her down beside him on the locker.

"I must have you alone for a minute, darling. Then we'll go back. You look warmer now—give me your hands!"

Chafing and kissing them, he touched his ring, and remembered the perfect pearl in his pocket.

"Give me my old ring back, Prim. Put it on my hand. It will never come off, now you've worn it. I've got yours here, and this for your mother."

He kissed the pearl on Prim's hand, and, swinging Billee's diamond bangle from his finger, looked down at it and laughed sheepishly.

"I was going to pitch it into the river yesterday. I was raving mad. I got it into my cracked head that she didn't want us to have each other."

He slipped the bangle into his pocket, took Prim in his arms, and looked tenderly into her eyes.

"I'd like to give her the stars out of the sky to-night! Isn't she wonderful, perfect about us, darling?"

"Yes," said Prim, her eyes sweet and steady.

Billee Cator played with her diamond bangle, slipping it up and down her childish arm and over her dimpled elbow, squinting at it between her gilt eyelashes.

"The reward of virtue, Freddie!" she tittered, as she showed it to Fred Bantry, with the little grin that turned her mouth up deliciously at the corners.

THE END

WRAITHS

I SEE them in the daytime,
And in the hush of night;
In autumn and in Maytime—
In seasons dark or bright.

They do not pause to greet me;
They heed no smile or sigh,
And vanish when they meet me—
The wraiths of days gone by.

William Hamilton Hayne

Shadows

THE ROMANCE OF AN IMMIGRANT GIRL IN NEW YORK

By Reita Lambert

Author of "Suspicion"

AMERICA! Engulfed in a babel of many dialects, the word was still the *motif* of the vocal potpourri rising from the decks of the *Morse*, as she came abreast the wharf at Ellis Island. Crowded against the rail of the grimy little utility craft to which they had been transferred at dawn from the lower deck of an ocean liner, they peered across the harbor—more than two hundred restive figures, a medley of color from the newly revised map of Europe.

The incessant babble of their voices was their brave anodyne for the fear that gripped them—the exquisite fear of a fabulous dream come true. Behind them lay a fortnight in the steerage and the fatiguing formalities of the immigration laws; but there was no fatigue now in those tense and eager faces turned toward the colossal figure of Liberty and the serrated crest of New York's skyline.

From the shore, the closely packed bodies merged into a vital mosaic of color. Though national costumes had for the most part been discarded, there was a lavish sprinkling of bright-colored shawls and kerchiefs among the women, who had otherwise conformed to their conception of American customs to the extent of an ill fitting skirt and blouse.

Many of the men—fresh from some inland village of Latvia or Poland, or the swampy reaches of the Memel—had topped their conventional coat and trousers with native headgear. Turban-shaped hats of imitation fur, and little hard flapjack caps, vied with shining derbies or stiff straws purchased for the occasion at Danzig or Libau.

Some there were who clung to their native dress in its entirety. These were the

Slavs straight from the wooded Carpathians, whose short, bright skirts, flowered aprons, snug bodices, and full sleeves gave them the appearance of an operetta chorus resting between rehearsals.

Tiptoe with eagerness, they hung over the rail, chattering excitedly or listening to the boom of the longshoremen's voices as the boat was hauled into the wharf. What lay before them within those gaunt buildings, they could not know. They were like dumb, eager children suspended for a moment on the wings of their high adventure. A final inspection, so they had been told, and they might alight in the land of their prodigious hopes.

There was one among the throng on the grimy deck of the *Morse* whose eyes rested on that impressive panorama across the bay with something akin to hauteur in their depths. The gesture of his hand, the calm assurance of his voice, as he spoke to the girl beside him, lent him a place apart from his fellows.

"It is there," he was saying in his own dialect, "that we stay, you and I. These others"—he waved his hand toward the clusters at the boat rail—"they go on, many of them, into the country; but the city is for us, my beloved!"

He patted the hand that lay so passively in the crook of his arm. He was a small man, and spare to the point of emaciation; but in his gently modulated voice, in his high-bridged nose with its thin nostrils, in the sparse white hair waving back from his lofty forehead, there was something that dignified his small stature. It even dignified his cheap but decent suit of gray and the clumsy, square-toed shoes on his feet.

"You will be brave and patient, little one." He nodded toward the island. "All

this takes but a short time. A few more questions, our small payment to the official, and we shall be free to go."

The girl beside him nodded, her gaze still reaching across the harbor.

It was indeed a test of his courage that he could view that awesome spectacle without a quaver of his tranquil voice; but all that—the lifting towers, the colossal huddle of stone and mortar—what were these compared to the gift he had brought to the New World? They were but the product of skillful brain and brawn and limitless wealth. What he had brought was the very source and inspiration of all high endeavor—genius. The New World was to be his debtor, for he had brought it Brazina—his daughter, the product of his mellow maturity, the inflorescence of his dreams.

"But they will separate us," the girl said. "You remember what the man Macha Sladeck told us."

"Only for the space of a moment," he soothed her. "You will go to the lady doctor, I to the man, as Macha Sladeck said. It is the precaution they must take against disease. After that"—he played a delicate tattoo with his forefinger on her arm—"we shall be free to go."

His smile reassured her. Her wide eyes reflected his own quiescence—eyes widely spaced, neither the unequivocal brown of her Ruthenian paternity nor the gray of her Moravian mother, but a blend of their perfect affinity—rich, golden, russet, like a limpid stream rippling over fallen autumn leaves. Her hair, drawn simply back into a heavy knot at the nape of her neck, had the same tawny glint of autumn that had touched her firm cheeks and throat, so that she seemed to radiate the faint, golden glow of a rich September sunset.

Hers was a type marked by no racial characteristics. She might have been the offspring of some legendary pair of lovers, or the creation of some passionately dreaming Pygmalion.

Here was beauty of an extraordinary sort—a beauty which, in its perfection, appeared almost fabricated, and which was all the more arresting since the girl seemed unaware of its existence. Yielding to her father's wishes, she had made no attempt to ape her fellow passengers in their shoddy efforts at "style." Her simple blue frock might have been purchased from any American mail order catalogue, and she wore no hat.

"Come, my darling!"

Her father drew her forward. Uniformed officials were herding the immigrants together, issuing orders in pantomime and gesture. The crowd surged obediently toward the gangplank and spilled down its length, gesticulating, talking. Brazina clung to her father's hand as they were swept into this lively current of crusaders—Jew and Pole, Roumanian and Esthonian. The guards importuned them facetiously:

"Come along! Step lively there! Watch your step!"

Children whimpered, men grinned, stooping shoulders borne down by years of deprivation lifted in response. Kramar Laborga, the girl's father, snuggled his daughter's hand closer to his thinly fleshed ribs, his smile holding against the general excitement.

"This way! In you go!"

A great yawning room, chilly and immaculate, received them. A rail separated the men from the women. Dazed and a little frightened, Brazina peered across it to where the men were gathered, searching for her father's white head. Then she was following the women down a long, narrow corridor, through a swinging door, and into a sun-flooded room, bare save for the benches on either side.

At the end of the room near the windows was a long, tall desk, behind which sat a pair of pleasant-faced young women, neatly uniformed. An attendant in white spoke to Brazina, but it was not until she saw the women fumbling about for blouse and jacket buttons that she understood what was expected of her.

She loosened her dress, a little confused, a little amazed that she should be expected to disrobe before so many. The room was full of a subdued clamor—the protests of children, the stifled, self-conscious giggle of other women, as they stripped to the waist for examination; but Brazina Laborga was as free of self-consciousness as of vanity—which was not strange, since one is the product of the other. It was not in vain that old Kramar Laborga had taught his daughter that her beauty was the gift of a higher power.

She fell into line now, interest and curiosity widening her eyes, fear fluttering her heart as she approached the physician's desk. Though the early October breeze blew crisply across the harbor and through

the lowered windows, the small room was stiflingly warm, and the air was shot through with the faintly fetid odor of warm, naked flesh.

With methodical haste the physicians diminished the double line—buxom Bohemian peasant women with pendulous breasts and muscular red arms; undernourished mothers and their sickly broods from the marshes of the Russian-Polish frontier; stocky Letts who had done a man's work in the fields since childhood, and had emerged with coarse red cheeks and hands and boundless health.

Aboard the liner they had all been very festive, full of bright chatter and prodigious plans. Now the flimsy cloak of insouciance was doffed with their outer garments. Meekness drugged their high spirits.

Brazina herself was not impervious to that creeping sense of fear, though she fought it valiantly. With her chin lifted and outthrust slightly, her firm, little breasts heaving with her quickened breath, she seemed, in that dingy, utilitarian office, like some bright peri set down in a world of coarser beings.

The plump peasant ahead of her moved off, shrugging the straps of her nether garments over her expansive shoulders, and grinning sheepish relief. Brazina stepped forward and laid her identifying card before the physician, who glanced at it before she raised her eyes to the girl's face. Then she spoke over her shoulder:

"Polly, will you look at this?"

They were young doctors, their business a wholesale professional affair. It was only occasionally that they caught a glimpse of personality in the swiftly moving stream of life that daily passed their tall desks. The doctor addressed as "Polly" turned her head and stared at Brazina.

"My dear, isn't she gorgeous?"

"I don't believe she's real," said the first speaker, and added, to Brazina: "You speak English?"

"A small bit," replied the girl; thereby revealing about half her store of English words.

"Who is she? Where is she from?"

"A Pole, apparently." Brazina shook her head. "No?" She glanced at the card the girl had brought. "She's a Ruthenian, whatever that is."

"Well, wait till the beauty specialists discover it," sighed the other, and turned back to her patient.

Brazina's doctor was busy with her instruments—a little padded tool to turn back the eyelids, and a flat stick to press down the tongue. Then came a tapping of gentle, capable fingers above the immature breasts.

"Perfection!" she murmured.

She scribbled her report on the girl's card, handed it back with a friendly, reassuring smile and a wistful sigh whose origin she could not trace.

Brazina moved off, clutching her card and slipping her arms into the dangling sleeves of her dress. Presently she was back in the spacious white room where the passengers of the liner were reassembling. The place was chaotic now. Officials were herding families together, trying out their meager fund of dialects, and shouting for the interpreter. There were further formalities ahead of the immigrants, it appeared—the inspection of their cards—more questions.

The plump peasant who had preceded Brazina in the medical room squatted resignedly upon a bench to nurse her weeping babe. Husbands rejoined their wives, with hysterical greetings and a noisy exchange of kisses. Cards were compared and the alien hieroglyphics puzzled over.

Brazina stood apart, the excitement that pervaded the great room eddying around her. Her eyes were on the broad stairhead where the returning men first appeared, and her thoughts were leaping forward to the moment when her father would rejoin her. He was very long, she thought. She was fighting off an incipient panic when a hand touched her shoulder and propelled her into a line crawling slowly past another tall desk.

Here, again, there was the same methodical haste that had marked the procedure in the medical room, but now there was an interpreter. Brazina was glad of that when she came abreast the desk.

Her name was Brazina Laborga. She was eighteen—nearly nineteen. She had gone to school for a time—yes, at a school in Lemberg, but mostly her father had taught her.

The scribbling inspector looked up. He was a kindly man, but hard pressed for time.

"Where's she from, did she say?"

"From some town near Lemberg. It's in Poland now. The girl's a Ruthenian, and a beauty—look at her!"

"Ruthenian—that's a new one on me."

The inspector looked over his glasses, whistled softly, and turned back to the interpreter, who translated the girl's replies.

"She's come with her father—he hasn't come up from medical examination yet. She's a dancer, she says—looks as if she might be."

"Professional?"

"Evidently not yet," the interpreter replied after a short exchange of words with the girl. "Father's brought her over to exploit her, apparently."

"Wise father!" commented the inspector dryly, and smiled down at Brazina.

There were additional questions, the girl's card was scribbled on once more, and she was told to "wait over there." As her eyes questioned the interpreter, he added:

"It's all right, my dear—you pass clean. Sit down, and don't worry."

His voice, more than his words, reassured her. She sat down on one of the long benches that commanded a view of the stairs.

The tumult in the big room took on a joyful note as families reassembled and started toward the railroad room, which meant the beginning of the last lap of their long journey. Brazina glanced at them as group followed group—men burdened down with bags and bundles and clumsy straw hampers; women clutching their babies, many of them dragging a fat two-year-old as well, and all of them joyfully loquacious.

Some there were, however, who were neither joyful nor loquacious, and whose egress led through another door. One of these Brazina recognized as a young mother from Nagy, who, with her new baby and young husband, had been one of the gayest passengers aboard the liner. Brazina wondered why she was weeping, and where her husband could be, as an attendant led her out.

The crowds were thinning rapidly when that same attendant approached Brazina, with the kindly interpreter in tow.

"What? You still here?" He affected genial surprise. "Well, go along with this man—he'll take care of you."

She rose slowly, mechanically, but she was shaking her head and trying to smile, as they evidently expected her to do.

"I am waiting for my father, thank you," she said.

"Exactly!" The inspector was immensely casual. "But you see, my dear,

your father has been detained." He seemed to measure the girl's self-possession before he went on. "The doctors say there's a little trouble of some sort with his eyes, and they've sent him to the hospital for a more thorough examination."

Her hands flew to her breast.

"Hospital!" she whispered.

"Oh, it's nothing," the interpreter said quickly. "They have to make sure it's nothing contagious—that's all."

"But—but can't I see him? How long—"

"Sure, you can see him to-morrow—or perhaps you'll be going on to-morrow." He patted her on the shoulder. "You're going to stay and make us a little visit to-night. Don't look frightened. You have nothing to fear, you know."

He started to move off, but she laid a hand on his sleeve.

"But then—after he has had the examination—we will be permitted to go? To-morrow, perhaps?"

"Sure, sure!" he said easily. "To-morrow, sure!"

To-morrow! The first great wave of despair and disappointment washed Brazina's hope back upon that rock. The white walls and tiled floor echoed the word hollowly. There was no doubt in the girl's eyes as she nodded—only distress, because her father must suffer, and dismay, because she must be separated from him for the first time in her memory.

There was compassion in the eyes of the attendant who led her away. The room to which he took her was almost as large as the one she had just left, and still more immaculate. Its floor and walls were white, with lofty windows, and innumerable benches fastened to the floor. There was a booth wherein sat a gentle-faced woman with a pile of yarn and knitting needles beside her. Children played noisily over the floor, and the benches were lined with women knitting, darning, or making lace.

A pleasant, plump little matron with a briskly bustling manner greeted Brazina in a limping imitation of her own tongue, directed the attendant to place the bulging straw suit case on the baggage rack, and left to greet another arrival. Brazina remained standing beside the baggage rack and the straw suit case, fighting hard to keep back the tears welling in her throat. It was vaguely comforting, at least, to find so many others also detained just outside

the gate of their hopes, and it was helpful to see how placidly they accepted the delay.

Brazina was still standing, a festive spot of color against the white wall, when the matron bustled back to her.

"Perhaps you would like to have some work to do," she suggested. "Knitting or sewing?"

Brazina summoned a smile of thanks.

"I shall only be here until to-morrow morning," she explained. "I am waiting for my father. He is having treatment in the hospital."

The matron nodded understandingly.

"Then come with me. There is a Ruthenian family over here. Perhaps, if you talked with them, you would feel more at home."

The girl followed her through a rising hum of strange tongues and many dialects to a distant bench and a careworn little woman who looked up eagerly from her lace.

"Here is some one for you to talk to," the matron said cheerfully. "Now you will not be so lonely."

Then she was away again, issuing brisk orders in another tongue.

The woman looked up at Brazina and spoke timidly.

"You have just come? And do you know Uzhorod, then?"

It was wonderfully comforting to hear the familiar words. Brazina dropped down on the bench, her fatigue and depression lifting, color flowing back into her cheeks. Yes, she had just come, and did she not know Uzhorod, since she had lived all her life in its very shadow? But now she was to live in America, in the great city over there—New York. She had heard about it since she was a child, and all these years she had been studying and working so that she should be worthy of it.

She was to dance for them—for the Americans. Ah, no, she had never danced in public. Her father would not permit that. Her lips trembled a little at mention of him. He was detained in the hospital, and she was very lonely without him. She had never been away from him so long, but to-morrow—her face brightened—to-morrow they would go on!

The little woman from Uzhorod looked at the girl sharply. The momentary interest that had lightened her face had gone.

"To-morrow! They will still be saying

that—to-morrow. That is what they said to me, at first; and then"—she picked up her lace—"it was next week, next month!"

"You mean," Brazina said incredulously, "that you have been here so long?"

"Four months," replied the woman from Uzhorod. She seemed to find a certain comfort in the girl's stricken face. "The black woman over there—she has been here six months."

"Six months!"

"Six." The woman nodded grimly. "It is a case for the courts—she waits. My husband is in the hospital, too." Her voice rose on a bitter note. "He is *not* sick! You should see how strong he is, yet they keep him there, and very soon all our money will be gone. My children, they fret, but anyway"—she wagged her head and sighed—"they learn English from the teacher on the roof. They speak it well, too."

Brazina's gaze wavered over the great room—none too large for the horde it housed. The baggage racks with their bulging bundles and bags, and the shawl-cluttered hooks, lent the place an air of impermanence that was oddly consoling; yet the woman from Uzhorod had been here for months.

For the first time it occurred to her to wonder why there were so many here. In a far corner of the room she caught sight of the little mother from Nagy, who was crying over her baby.

Brazina strolled across to one of the tall windows. The sill was shoulder high, and she spread her elbows and lifted herself on tiptoe to look across the harbor. It was now that she noticed the bars at the windows. Bars! They imbued her with a sudden, chilly fear.

The sun had set, and, as she looked, the peaked and jagged wall of the city was gradually perforated with dots of light. She watched them flash into being one by one, until each building was like a great target pierced to its luminous vitals by a thousand shots of flame.

From childhood she had listened, wide-eyed, to her father's marvelous tales of the New World. Her first glimpse of the majestic Lady of Liberty, and of the wide harbor alive with chugging craft, had thrilled her; but even this had not prepared her for the spectacle of lower New York casually turning on its electric current.

The wonder of that blazing mass of ma-

sonry shook her self-command. She felt terribly futile, insignificant, alone. She longed desperately for the touch of her father's hand on hers, for the sound of his tender, reassuring voice. She knew, even as she thought of him and longed for him, that her fear was unworthy of his teachings, and her spirit lifted belligerently. She would not be afraid! The great city across that spangled stretch of water should be hers—for he had said so!

II

THERE is probably no more effective halter for the free spirit than routine. During the days that followed Brazina Laborga's admittance into the detention building, the undeviating regularity of her daily life was like a slow, insidious drug upon her native exuberance. The business of rising and retiring, when the whole mass of detained peasants were packed in the huge common sleeping room, row upon row, tier upon tier, like books on a shelf; the meals in the great bare hall, with the long, scrubbed tables, the thick cups and plates; the polyglot hum and buzz of chatter—all this was a most depersonalizing influence.

The old ballet master had been incorporated into the monotonous pattern, too. He had become one of the hundreds of peripatetic figures peopling the long corridors of the hospital in mouse-colored pyjamas and utilitarian felt slippers. Hospital life had taken its toll of his hopeful buoyancy; but the light that leaped into his eyes at the sight of his daughter was imperishable.

Every day she was permitted to see him. Every day the final decision that they were awaiting was postponed.

"They are very busy," Kramar Laborga told his daughter, "and we must not complain. After all, it is only a week's delay, and very soon we shall be going on."

He looked older, more fragile. The gray pyjamas hung baggily on his spare body, and the felt slippers were too large by a size; but his smile for Brazina was valiant.

"But why"—the girl's young face was puckered with incomprehension—"why must we stay here? Are there not doctors who can help you in the city? It is so hard, this waiting!"

"Hard, beloved—yes, but it is the law. They have no room for the sick there"—he nodded toward the city—"and we must be patient. You have seen how many

others there are who must wait, too." He took her chin between his fingers. "And you? Are you keeping my girl strong and supple? Are you doing your exercises every day?"

Her eyes fell, her lips trembled.

"I am never alone. They would laugh at me."

He flamed into anger.

"Laugh! And what of it? Have I not told you that stupid minds find mirth in all unexplained beauty? But it is no mirth—it is ignorance. They laugh at that which they do not understand. Bah!" He swayed from side to side with exasperation. "How shall you win that for which we have striven? Attend me!"

Brazina was on her feet instantly.

"Yes, father."

"Heels together—arms high—slowly, now! Remember there is an angle at which the elbow is gross. On your toes—toes, I say! Ah, you are like a cow! Take off those shoes."

The ward was one for the "walking patients"—a long room with many windows. Many beds, neatly spread for the day, lined its length. A few gray-clad figures were wandering about, and now they paused, arrested by the unexampled sight of that slender young body swaying and bending to the compelling demand of the old man's voice.

Arms high, little stockinged heels close, the girl became a lovely contradiction of all common anatomical laws. Backward drooped her head until the bright masses of her hair caressed her heels and limp fingers touched the floor. Up again, arms spread, chin lifted—up to the very tips of her toes, until the onlookers would scarcely have felt surprise if she had floated off serenely through the open window.

They watched—incipient amusement giving place to awe—while the old man barked out his orders to Brazina. Only for a moment it lasted; then his voice lost its harsh severity.

"Well, well, that is enough, but do not forget another day." His voice caressed her now. "Remember, art knows no self-consciousness. Do not be so vain as to think that your actions attract all eyes. It is not *you* that command attention, but your art—and that is God-given."

"Yes, father." She sat down beside him on the bed. This was the tune of his oft-repeated homily, and she knew it well.

"But it is not easy, and I am very lonely. This is a strange place."

"Lonely!" he scoffed. "Among so many! A big girl—nineteen years old!"

She blinked back her tears.

"How long do you think we must wait?"

"Oh, a short time, very short now." He spoke nonchalantly. "You would not be my Brazina if you were not brave. You must run back now. Come, I shall walk with you!"

They went into the corridor together, where other gray-clad figures were lounging about or propelling carts of food from door to door. He watched her hurrying toward the long covered bridge that connected the two islands, and nodded his pride in her. It was good, that walk of Brazina's—no protruding knees there, no offensive swing to hips and shoulders.

The old man turned back into the ward, still nodding his complete satisfaction in his last pupil, and came abruptly face to face with the physician and interpreter.

It was not a long conference. The physician was an affable young man, and immensely capable, it seemed to the ballet master. The interpreter was almost wagish. There was to be no further examination. That would not be necessary. The doctor lounged against the iron footboard of the bed and spoke to the interpreter, who in turn spoke to the ballet master.

"Trachoma—and what is that?"

"That is the trouble with your eyes," the interpreter explained. "Perhaps you contracted it on the way across, or perhaps before. It is serious and contagious."

"But it is not fatal!" the ballet master broke in.

"Sometimes, unless it is treated properly and at once."

Kramar Laborga nodded his white head thoughtfully.

"And that—the treatment—will cost money, I suppose?"

"Yes, it would."

"Well, then, I have some money. How long will it take?"

"You don't understand," said the interpreter, not unmoved by the old man's determinedly cheerful manner. "We cannot treat it here, and while you have it you will be barred from entering the country. The cure, you see, takes a matter of two or three months. After that, if the cure is complete, you will be eligible. You might come back and try again."

"Back!" echoed Kramar Laborga, and sat down carefully in the straight chair beside the bed. "Then I am not permitted to remain? That is what you mean?"

"Not right now, while you've got this trouble with your eyes. You go back home, put yourself under treatment, and in a few months you'll probably be all right."

The ballet master made a pretense of adjusting the folds of his preposterous gray jacket, and appeared to be considering the interpreter's words carefully. Finally he raised his head.

"But," he said gently, "if they would permit me to enter the country—to take the treatment here—"

"Impossible," broke in the interpreter. "You are an intelligent man, and you can see yourself how impossible that would be. The disease is infectious. It's too bad, but there you are."

There he was! There was more talk before the doctor and the interpreter moved off. Old Laborga was a game old boy, they decided, and unusually reasonable. So many howl, or put up a fight; but he took his medicine like a gentleman. No doubt he would go back on the next boat, meek as a lamb.

It was not until the lights were out in the long ward, and the snores from the occupied beds rose to mingle in a cacophonous medley, that the ballet master released the terrible facts to conscious consideration. He regarded them without rancor, but through a sort of deathly chill that clarified them starkly.

His infected eyes must be treated, or he would be blind—soon. It was a deadly, swift-moving monster, that disease. They had told him that he could go home and undergo treatment for a few months, and after that he would be eligible.

They had said it to reassure him. How could they know what lay behind him? How could they know of the long, frugal years, of his herculean effort to save enough from his meager earnings to make this journey possible? And now they would deport him!

His coolly reflective mood would not hold against this. For a moment terror and despair had their will of him. Was he to be frustrated now, after all these years? Would they shut the gate upon him, when he brought them his most priceless gift?

And what of that gift—what of Brazina? Was her rare genius, her carefully trained

skill, to be exhibited, after all, for the paltry pittance they had offered him in Uzhorod and Lemberg?

He contemplated this through his rising frenzy. Brazina, the flower of his rich maturity, whose coming had marked the passing of her mother, and who—so he had fancied—had caught and held that fleeting spirit and blended it with her own!

He had been ballet master at the opera in Lemberg during those early years. When he saw little Brazina wriggling in plump-legged imitation of his pupils, his plan was born, and the budding talent of the child had fostered it. How he had nurtured the grace and beauty of that lovely body against the day when he could give it a proper setting! How he had guarded her against the careless praise of the few who had seen her! How he had struggled with all his cunning craftsmanship to perfect that rare gift of hers!

And now, with his work complete and the future ready to unfold before her like a golden carpet, she was held here among gross clouts, a prisoner; and he himself was the barrier that kept her outside the gates of the city where triumph should have been hers!

He was quiescent now against his pillow, his slender reserve of strength exhausted, his head throbbing. It seemed to his disordered senses that the blindness threatening him was already filming his vision. The oblong yellow light that was the door seemed to expand and contract as he looked at it. The bars at the long windows oscillated sinuously. The subdued murmur of nocturnal harbor activities mingled with the low hum of voices as the night nurses stopped to chat in the corridor.

He felt a terrible sense of futility. He had been so assured, so certain of himself all these years, and now he was helpless to save either himself or his Brazina. With other undesirables they would be herded together and shipped back on the next boat.

Even if he could have his eyes treated, even if they could be cured—what then? The little horde of bank notes in the wallet beneath his pillow, harvest of nearly a score of years, would be gone, and with it the last chance of realizing his long dream.

III

WHEN Brazina came to her father the following morning, he greeted her cheerily,

but utilized none of the precious moments of her visit in his usual airy badinage.

"Sit down, my dear—sit down. You slept well? Of course you did. No, you must not touch me. That is better."

She threw him a kiss from her finger tips, and he smacked his lips in appreciation.

"Have you seen the doctor yet, father?"

"Ah, I saw him long ago—yes, indeed, my darling."

"And what did he say?" She was thrilling with eagerness. "Are your eyes much better, then?"

"Much!" He wagged his head from side to side. "Much better, to be sure."

She brought her hands together in soft applause.

"Then we may go soon?"

"Very soon," he assured her. "You've done your exercises?"

She nodded.

"Good!" He bent forward. There was a compelling solemnity in his manner that stilled the girl's exhilaration. "This is a great city, this New York, as I have told you. One could put Lemberg and Uzhorod both into one of its public parks, and the sokol on the stage of its opera house."

"Yes, father, I know, but—"

"You do not know until you have seen," he said sharply. "You do not know how frightening it may be to find yourself in such a great, strange place, where the customs of the people are unfamiliar and the words they speak to you mean nothing."

"But I shall soon learn, father."

"It is nothing, whether you know their tongue or not," he said vehemently. "Art is the same in any language—that is what I would have you remember. If you are intimidated by the strangeness all about you, how can you dance? And that is the only thing that is important—that you should dance as only you can!" His voice rose passionately, his eyes were burning. "Though you are an unknown, though you have come in the manner of a peasant, and though the city were twice as great, you have no equal—that I know! Who should know better than I?"

The girl was puzzled by the fierceness of his voice. Noting this, he laughed gently.

"Ah, do not be alarmed, little one! I only speak thus because I know what is before you, and because now my little bird must use her own wings."

"But you will be there, father! You will—"

"Bah!" he ejaculated. "What am I in a place like this New York? An old ballet master of whom they know nothing—a silly, useless old man!"

"You are not old!" the girl defended hotly.

"I was five and forty when you were born, my dear," he reminded her. "In America, that is old." He shook his head thoughtfully. "No, I no longer matter. It does not make me too sad, that thought. The good God has been kind to me. He will be kind to you, if you are a good girl and remember the things I have taught you." He smiled at her. "I have no fear for you—none."

She had been moving restlessly, and now she broke into voluble speech. When did he think they would be permitted to go? There had been a visitor to-day—a cousin of the little woman from Uzhorod. She had lived in America for three years, and she had told the woman from Uzhorod—

The old man was silent in the eager flow of words. He drifted off in wistful retrospect to a tiny stone house in the shadow of the wooded Carpathians. Great horned oxen were plowing the ruddy soil in a nearby field. A lazy breeze rippled the maize and the sunflowers. From the open door of a neighboring house gay voices mingled with the blithe twang of a guitar. The odor of white wine and bread and sausage and onions was in his nostrils. The memory of a graceful little figure pirouetting on her toes before the stone steps of the cottage was more real, for a moment, than the bright figure beside him.

"And she says they have to pay as much as forty silver crowns for one seat at the opera, father. I don't believe you are listening to me."

"Ah—forty!" he echoed. "Yes, I am listening. Forty, eh? I made that much at Lemberg more than twenty years ago—and they were cows, those girls—all knees and elbows." He nodded morosely. "It was not much money for that ballet—forty kronen."

"For one seat at the opera," Brazina repeated, and took a long breath. "When shall we be starting, father? To-morrow, do you think, or even to-day, perhaps?"

"Eh? To-morrow—I shouldn't wonder." He wagged his head, as if to free his brain of the retrospective film still clinging to it. "My dear, it just occurs to me—I want you to take this." He reached be-

neath his pillow for a crude leather wallet barred with narrow brass bands and secured by a flimsy lock. "Keep it with you, and do not let it out of your sight." She took it wonderingly. "Here," he explained petulantly, "I have no place for it." He lowered his voice. "I do not trust these others. The man who sleeps next to me—well, he does not look honest, and the one on the other side is no better. I sleep soundly, as you know. Take it with you. You will be cautious. It is all yours, anyway."

Brazina's eyes were troubled as they clung to the quaint and clumsy old wallet. She could not remember when her father had not carried it. He reproached her genially. She was a baby—it was about time she grew up. He had spoiled her.

Her exhilaration at the prospect of an early release had made her a little giddy. She responded to her father's final admonitions with a dutiful bob of her head, while her truant thoughts did their castle building undisturbed.

When it was time for her to leave him, her father was still talking feverishly, almost incoherently. His broken sentences were strung together with endearments.

"You will remember, my darling, that everything I have ever done or may do for you gives me happiness. For more than eighteen years I have had no life except in you—no object except to make you happy and prepare you for life. I am so much a part of you that you can never wholly lose me. No, you must not kiss me. Go back and be patient for just a few hours longer."

She was willing enough to go. There was much to be done now that she would be leaving the island so soon. More than one glance followed her as she hurried along the long corridor, for she seemed to be holding herself to the floor with difficulty.

Her father had made no motion to walk part of the way with her. He was clutching his chair with both hands as she swung through the doorway. That afternoon he was very gay with the doctors and nurses. He beamed with smiles, and was eager to help to push the food carts to the doors of the other wards.

"He's a gay old boy, that Pole!"

"Ruthenian, my dear. The interpreter says he'll take your head off if you call him anything else. It appears that a Ruthenian considers himself more spiffy than a Pole."

He was permitted to wander at will through the halls. The autumn dusk, falling early, found him chatting with the cook at the kitchen door.

The cook, a mountainous testimony to his own culinary skill, and master of half a dozen Russian dialects, confided his tale to the ballet master. He had come more than ten years before from the Ukraine, had been detained for some weeks at the island, and upon his release had taken up his residence in New York.

"God knows that is a great city," he conceded huskily; "but not for me!"

"Then you did not stay?"

The cook shook his massive head a great many times.

"I came back here. I had been comfortable here, you see. They needed a cook, and here I have been ever since." He chuckled. "It is an excellent idea, eh? One is in America and yet not in America. I go often across on the ferry, and walk around the streets, but I am always glad to get back, you may be sure."

The kitchen door was the last opening into the long corridor of the hospital. Beyond it lay the covered passageway that led to the other island and the detention buildings. The ballet master knew that on either side of that passageway there were many windows placed at regular intervals in the gray stone walls. Since it was still only dusk, the lights had not been turned on, so that when the cook drifted back to his range, and old Laborga saw that for the moment he was unobserved, he sauntered a few casual steps along the corridor before he broke into a run.

It was amazingly simple. Fortunately it took but a moment or two, and there was no one about. The old man raised a window not too near the hospital corridor. Dusk lay gray, almost impenetrable, over the harbor, as he dropped to the pebbled stretch of earth below.

The ludicrous gray pyjamas blended with the gray of the gaunt buildings behind him, and with the enveloping dusk. He stood for a moment, his eyes on the nebulous towers of lower New York. Then they lifted to the benignant figure of Liberty, who had lighted her torch to hail her oncoming flood of guests.

Liberty! His would be a double triumph—liberty for himself, and liberty as his last gift to Brazina.

The water beneath him lipped gently at

the sea wall on which he stood; and when he dropped, with his eyes still clinging to that flaming torch, there was only a faint plash like a sigh. When the excited little group from the hospital reached the sea wall, there was only a widening circle of ripples on the smooth surface of the water to mark the place where the old man had disappeared.

IV

THE newspapers disposed of the affair in a few lines—"Immigrant a suicide on Ellis Island. Despondence due to ill health believed to be the cause."

To Brazina it was detailed more tenderly. The tragedy won for her the solitude she had craved, and the warm solicitude of the entire island as well; but the shock left her dazed, with her great, russet eyes dry and ringed around with smoky circles.

One of the resident physicians took the girl into his own household, and turned her over to the willing ministrations of his pleasant-faced wife.

"The poor, lovely child!" said the American lady. "What a cruel thing for him to do—to leave her like this, alone in a strange country!"

"I suppose he despaired of ever being cured," the doctor hazarded. "Yet he seemed a nice enough old boy—rather superior, I thought."

The doctor's wife gave Brazina a neat little room at the top of the house, with a view of the Woolworth Building, which she was careful to point out. She found it difficult to comfort the bereaved girl, though she went so far as to try to learn her language.

"Better just let her alone," the doctor advised.

His wife sighed and conceded that perhaps it would be best.

For several days Brazina's dazed incomprehension held. She was indeed a soul bereft, a bit of human enginery robbed of its motive power. She had lived and breathed and thought only in response to that tender paternal control. Without her father, her world was a vast and chilly emptiness—more vast, more chilly, since the reason for the old ballet master's suicide was unknown to her.

With the harbor refusing to yield her father's body, and with Brazina herself half deranged with grief, her case became a problem for official consideration. One

night, while her plight was being discussed by the authorities, she opened the shabby wallet and found the answer to her dumb query. It was no illegible scrawl of hot hysteria, that letter, tucked in among the old man's other treasures, no abject brief of his despair, but an unfevered account of the facts. He wrote of his threatened deportation, and then:

I leave you, my darling, knowing that you are ready to meet the world alone. If I could have lived it would only have been to glory in your success and to share it with you, for I could have been of no further service to you alive. I know that if I had submitted, and had gone back to our native country, you would have insisted upon coming with me. I could not permit that, and so I set you free. The memory of this, my last gift to you, will serve as an incentive to you. For my sake, as well as your own, you will make our beautiful dream come true.

I have no fears for your future. You have your memories to protect you. The man who saw you dance on the steamer, and who gave me his card, will help you. Go direct to him, as we planned. You have enough money to keep you from want until you begin to earn. May God's blessings be with you!

Brazina sat with the sheet of paper on her knees until the neat script blurred into a cloudy blot of blue. In that moment the docile child became a woman. Her father's sacrifice had done that for her, too. Her sobs, when they came, were not bitter, but blessedly healing, and at last she went to sleep with the letter beneath her wet cheek.

Morning found life reborn in her darkly shadowed eyes. To grieve further, and thereby to unfit herself for the tasks before her, would be to play her father false. Besides, her world was no longer empty now. His spirit was close to her—the only real presence in all this island city of frustrated souls.

To the officials, and to her fellow prisoners, she was still a pathetic but picturesque victim of tragic circumstances, upon whom, if she had permitted, they would have lavished affection and sympathy. The fact that she remained remote and unresponsive seemed to them a gloomy foreboding, and they shook their heads in consternation. They did not know that Kramar Laborga had calmly dropped to his death in order that his daughter might inherit his bequest of liberty, so they could not know that she had also inherited a legacy of valor.

True, she felt more than ever the desolation of her position, and longed for the familiar customs and language of her own

people; but she shook off this oppressive nostalgia, and fixed her eyes and heart on the promise of those peaks and spires across the harbor. She had studied the card her father had inclosed in his farewell letter—the card of Macha Sladeck, whom they had met aboard the boat.

That meeting had been one of the pleasant incidents of travel. A native of Kosice, in their own country, he was making his return trip from a first visit home after half a dozen years. It was from him, on the long days aboard the steamer, that Brazina and her father had heard their first-hand reports of America. Macha Sladeck had already taken out his first naturalization papers, he told them. His return visit to his homeland had strengthened his decision to make New York his home.

He had been a little haughty at first. He had carefully explained that he was traveling in the steerage from choice, not from necessity.

Then, one evening, Brazina's docile spirit had broken loose from her father's strictest injunction. From a hooded niche down the deck the buoyant notes of a concertina had reached them. The sun had set, and the sea was benevolently placid. The decks were crowded with chatting, lethargic figures—men lounging against the rail; women sitting on the benches, their beshawled heads bent over their needlework or their babes, while they drew word pictures of their fabulous future.

The strains of the concertina had had the effect of a wholesale injection of some exhilarating drug on those lax figures. Bodies started to sway and feet to tap. An old Russian rocked from side to side, slapping his thighs with knotty hands. Brazina, hanging listlessly over the rail, and watching the ceaseless swirl of water beneath her, felt a guilty tremor of response. She began to move slowly, furtively along the deck.

A circle had already formed about the concertina player, leaving a clear space, and into this stepped a young man dragging a laughing girl by the hand. With their hands on each other's shoulders, they began to whirl—the girl in her flowered apron and bright kerchief, the man in his blue smock and many-colored bandanna—whirling, dipping, clicking heels. Others followed, until the circle was full of dancing couples, like so many gorgeous tops spinning endlessly.

Enraptured, Brazina watched them. Their laughter and the music washed over her. Then, suddenly, she was swept into their midst, symphonized with the pulsant rhythm of an ancient folk song. The old man who was slapping his thighs took up the heady, monotonous theme in a quavering voice. It was the hoisting song of the Kamyshin fishermen:

"It 'll go of itself!
It 'll go of itself,
It doesn't! It doesn't!
There goes!"

The lure had been irresistible. Only physical force or the stern admonition of her father could have held Brazina Laborga outside of the circle. Hands cupping pliant hips, elbows akimbo, head flung back, youth took its toll from the restraint of those long, confining days on the ship. Her whirling body was the very substance of the spirited melody, her leaping pulses were the very beat of its rhythmical flow.

She did not see that the others had fallen back, that their closely packed bodies had formed a little amphitheater for her, wherein she danced alone. She did not know that they were applauding softly and urging her on in half a dozen different tongues.

Suddenly, breaking through her absorption like a peal of ominous thunder, came the boom of her father's angry voice. She came to a guilty standstill, and moved swiftly, guiltily, through the throng of admiring spectators.

"What are you thinking of? How dare you, after all that I have said?"

The old ballet master's cheeks were gray with passion as he led her along the deck.

"But it was only natural," broke in the voice of Macha Sladeck. "The child dances well."

"But not for such as these!" the old man contended angrily. "It is not for this that I have taught her—poured myself into her. Dances well! And why not? The good God has given her genius, and since babyhood I have taught her. If I had wanted to sell her so cheap, she would now have been *première danseuse* at the opera in Lemberg, or in Uzhorod." He shook his finger at Brazina, softening as his eyes rested on her repentant face. "She knows well why I am angry!"

"I'm sorry, father. The music—"

"Bah! Sit there and do not move."

She sat down, immensely guilty, on the camp chair he had indicated.

"You are saving her, then?" observed Macha Sladeck.

The old man shrugged impatiently.

"One does not put new wine into old skins."

"She does indeed dance well," Macha Sladeck said musingly. "In America there are many who dance well, however."

"None like my Brazina," the ballet master retorted sharply.

"Possibly not," Macha Sladeck conceded, soothing the old man with his kindly tone. "I merely wished to warn you that she would have many competitors, and that the road is a hard one to travel."

Their low-voiced conversation was lost on Brazina, who was relieved that her father's attention had been so effectively diverted from her wrongdoing; but she saw Sladeck's card change hands.

"He is in the business, he says," her father told her later. "He has offered to help us when we arrive. It appears that he engages artists for the stage." He nodded placidly. "We shall go to see him, perhaps."

Now that same card lay in Brazina Laborga's narrow palm, the golden key to her future. It was as if the fates had provisioned the ballet master's death, and had equipped her against her resultant helplessness. She locked the card in the shabby wallet, and set herself the task of preparing for her departure.

All effort to reclaim her father's body had been abandoned. To the girl, that poor bit of flesh and bone was no longer important. She had him close to her heart. Never had he seemed closer, and now he would never leave her. She sensed, however, that this gruesome business had delayed her departure, and concluded that the moment of her release was at hand.

In the main, her conclusion was correct. To the authorities, Brazina Laborga was no more than a name that had its place in the immigration archives. True, her father's suicide had lent it a small significance, and her beauty, more obvious now that she had been given a place apart from the rest, had colored it slightly; but she was only one of many, many thousands, and the law may not discriminate among individuals.

She slipped back, therefore, into the impersonal status of a "case" thoughtfully considered and swiftly disposed of. Now that she was bereft of her father's protec-

tion, her eligibility as a single individual must be considered.

She was young, and of a profession whose monetary possibilities were dubious. In response to their questions, it developed that she had no friends, no relatives, in America. It also appeared that she had never earned. Whatever plans the dead ballet master may have entertained for her future had evidently died with him. Although she possessed the stipulated sum of money demanded of each incoming immigrant, this would not reimburse the government were she to become a public charge and have to be deported.

That this eventuality was considered highly probable was evident. The girl's youth and beauty militated against her. On the whole, it seemed a kindness to send her home. When they had reached this logical conclusion, they sent for Brazina and the interpreter.

The girl heard the decision with wide-eyed incredulity. Since she made no reply, the interpreter went over it again, very slowly and kindly.

"We know you must be homesick," he said. "New York is a big place for a foreign girl who is all alone—very lonely, and dangerous, too. You have an aunt living at home?"

"But she is very poor," Brazina told him, "and she has nine children to care for. I do not know her well."

"But she is your aunt," insisted the interpreter, for the official decision was built upon that. "You have no relatives here. You are not self-supporting. What would you do here, alone in a strange country?"

"I dance," she told him simply.

"Poor baby!" the interpreter sighed. "Dance, does she?" He had spoken in English. Now he turned patiently back to the girl. "Home is the place for you, child. There is a boat sailing to-morrow."

It seemed to Brazina that her heart did not start to beat again until she was back in her little sanctuary at the physician's house.

The interpreter had believed that she would be glad to go. He still believed that she would be glad when once she had started; but Brazina could not be measured by the common foot rule. The interpreter did not know that. He did not know the rare material that had gone into the making of the ballet master's daughter.

She had been a precious vessel—a relic

from the wreckage of Kramar Laborga's own dreams—into which he had poured the mellow wine of his unique philosophy and the substance of those bright hopes that had failed to materialize for him. Hers had been a lonely childhood, with her father as her only companion. She had grown up an oddly complex creature, half child, half woman, gravely mature in things of the mind, but markedly unworldly; for it is from her contemporaries that a young girl learns life's sophistries. No, the authorities did not know Brazina.

Once in her little room, she sat down on the edge of the narrow bed and reviewed her short encounter with the interpreter. During those weeks on the island, she had come to recognize the word that was at once the dread and the disaster of that pitiful assemblage—deportation. Like a grisly vulture it seemed to be forever circling above those gaunt buildings, ready to swoop down on some frustrated soul and carry off its last vestige of hope; and now it hovered over Brazina.

They had planned to send her back, when all her short life had been spent in arduous but hopeful preparation for the thing they would refuse her. So schooled had she been to this belief, so saturated with her father's stanch resolve, that the possibility of their denying her had never occurred to her.

Her first reaction of bewildered unbelief gave place to a savage resentment. It was not possible! They did not understand! She was intended for America, had been consecrated to America since childhood. They would not turn her away now, and have her betray her dead!

She must try to explain to them that it was for her father, as much as for herself, that she must go on—must make his dreams come true. He had given his life for this very thing. Would they have him give it in vain? She would tell them that she was no child, that one day she would do honor to the country from which they were barring her.

It was to the doctor that she finally appealed—through his attendant, who was also his interpreter.

"Tell him that I ask his help. They would send me home."

"He says that it is best for you."

"But I have no home now!"

"He says that it is best," repeated the interpreter. The doctor smiled gravely at

her and patted her soothingly on the shoulder. "He says you are too young."

"I am nearly nineteen. I can work."

The doctor's eyes were compassionate. He knew too well the perils that lurked in the great city looming across the harbor. Brazina, sitting very straight and pale on the plain chair in his office, with her hands clasped on her lap, knew his answers before they came. In his face she read gentle indulgence and pity, but no understanding of what despair underlay her arresting and childish loveliness.

"Without your father you are not eligible for entrance," the interpreter was saying. "It would be dangerous for you to enter this country, especially as you have no relatives here. You do not know the language or the customs. We will send you safely home."

Looking at her, the physician marveled at her beauty—marveled and sighed that such a prodigality of gifts should have been lavished on this humble little waif. Not even the shabby and ill fitting little frock, or the cheap cotton stockings, could conceal the supple symmetry of that lithe figure.

Brazina was conscious of his scrutiny. She knew that it could not penetrate to her soul, and she was glad. Since no words of hers could really show him the truth, better to leave him in harmless conjecture. She gave him an uncertain smile, and he watched her go, wagging his head musingly at the pranks of fate.

"Poor little soul! My heart aches for her," the doctor's wife told him that evening. "I really think she wanted to stay."

"To send that child to New York would be like sending *Little Red Riding Hood* to see her granny after the wolf had eaten the old lady."

"She is such a lovely thing!"

"Too lovely, my dear. Ten years from now she'll be some peasant's wife, with red arms, no waist line, and half a dozen children," the doctor said. "Anyway, you've done the kid a good turn, taking her in like this. There's a boat going to Danzig tomorrow, and your trouble will be over."

Their voices came faintly up the stairs to Brazina's room. She sensed that they were speaking of her, and wished desperately that she could understand their alien tongue. She thought wistfully of the group that met daily on the roof of the detention building, where an altruistic social worker

taught rudimentary English to those anxious to learn. The old ballet master had opposed her joining the group.

"Would you mix with such nobodies?" he had demanded scornfully. "There is time enough to learn when you can learn correctly."

Of course, he had not foreseen all this.

She was in bed when the kindly doctor's wife came up to say good night and to pat her gently on the hand. Brazina was touched, though it was difficult to realize that such kindness could also be so blind. She lay awake for a long time, peering wide-eyed through the darkness. Then she sat up, her gaze on the window. There were no bars here, yet she was a prisoner. Prisoner! It had been her father's word in referring to the misfortunes of his native land. America had been its antithesis—freedom.

She got out of bed and padded softly to the window. Over there lay America, still aglow, though it must be nearly midnight. Rich! There was lavish abandon in those lights that never dimmed. The darkness seemed to bring the city closer—so close that if she had been a boy, she might have thrown a stone and heard its impact on the wall of that tall building.

She spoke her father's name softly, for at night his presence was an almost tangible thing. He had taken his freedom so that she might achieve hers.

The heavy sense of futility that had lain upon her began to lift. There were no bars at the window, or at the doors. The palms of her hands were clammy cold. She turned away from the window, and began coiling up her great mane of hair. Then, very cautiously, she unfastened the straps on the bulky straw suit case beneath her bed.

Here, neatly folded, lay the Sunday costume that had been her heart's delight since Mother Havlicek had made it for her not three months before.

"They will not be wearing these things in America," the dressmaker had opined sagely, but the ballet master had chided her harshly.

"My girl does not pretend to be what she is not," he maintained.

It had been his dearest whim that she should make her bow to the world of her adoption in native costume.

"It is one to be proud of," he told his daughter.

Now she fumbled tenderly with the precious garments—the delicate muslin blouse, the bodice and full skirt of deep, rich red, the gayly flowered apron, the triangular kerchief. Swiftly she slipped them on, the shiny leather boots last of all, while her heart beat to suffocation, and she shivered in the chill air.

When she was fully dressed, she tucked her father's wallet into her bodice.

V

THE house was very still and dark as Brazina felt her way out into the hall and down the stairs. Her teeth showed a tendency to chatter, so she pressed the knuckles of her left hand tightly against her lips as she slipped the lock on the front door, let herself out, and closed it softly behind her.

A pallid young moon rode over the harbor, and she knew that down at the ferry landing a vigilant sentry kept watch. Vague ideas of secretly boarding one of the small craft that put in at the island had formed themselves in her mind. She realized that there would be no more boats at this hour; but there must be a way, she had money, and the city was so close!

She crept along in the shadow of the house, a shadow herself, scarcely breathing, driven by the necessity of escaping the terrible doom that hung over her. She had no predetermined idea as to how she was to bridge the dark gulf before her, but she hurried desperately on. There came to her a half formed thought of swimming to the shore that seemed so close. She swam well. Often she had swum the Unghar at its widest point.

When at last she came to the encompassing sea wall, she crouched there breathless. She knew that she had not been observed. Behind her was the gaunt arm of the detention buildings, before her the serried pile of lower New York.

The harbor was almost bereft of moving craft, but here and there was the elliptic shadow of an anchored ship outlined by its blinking lights. The subdued hum of the city rode over to her like the snore of some restlessly sleeping monster. She stood on the wall, frightened, desperate—a bird hanging precariously on Icarian wings—her eyes straining through the darkness. Then she crumpled swiftly into a little heap.

A small oblong shadow was creeping along the wall of the island to the accom-

paniment of a muffled *put, put*, and the sound of a man's voice pitched in a low, unmelodious tune. She watched it approach. It was a small boat, painted white, with the figure of a man lounging at the wheel.

There was something so nonchalant, so lazily indifferent, in the attitude of this midnight mariner and in the casual drifting of the little launch, not ten feet from where she stood, that Brazina was oddly reassured. She stood up and lifted her voice, utilizing two of her scanty stock of American words:

"Hey! Come!"

The launch appeared to express an almost human surprise, for it swerved sharply away from her. Then it turned back, and crept timidly in toward the wall. When it was still half a dozen feet from her, she raised herself to the balls of her feet, lifted her arms high, and stood there poised for an instant, while she gaged the distance before she leaped.

She landed squarely amidships, not three feet from the man at the wheel. So lightly had she leaped that the little boat scarcely quivered at the contact. For an instant she stood quivering, while a whispered oath escaped the man. Then he said pleasantly, and a little unsteadily:

"Buy your tickets at the ticket office! Keep in line, and don't shove!"

He drew a long breath, closed his eyes, and very gravely counted ten, after which he opened them smilingly. Seeing the girl still standing there, he stared for a long moment before he addressed her.

"Good evening! Nice evening, isn't it?"

Brazina raised her arm, reassured by the friendly inflection of his voice, and pointed toward the Battery.

"I go there," she announced, and fumbled for the wallet in her bodice.

Her chilled fingers were clumsy, but finally she managed to extract a coin, which she held out invitingly. He shrank back, both hands thrust out before him.

"Y-you go there, do you?" he stammered. "All right—but where did you come from? That's what I'm interested in right now."

Once more he brushed his hand across his eyes. Then, impulsively, he dived into his hip pocket, dragged forth a silver flask, and hurled it into the water. This done, he sighed voluminously and lifted his blurred gaze to see the slender figure of

Brazina still before him, her outstretched hand still proffering him the coin.

For a long moment he peered through the enfolding darkness at the pallid outline of her face, while the little launch floundered lazily. Then he swore again, softly, happily.

"By Jove, maybe it's real! I'll shoot back to the club and take a look!"

He put his hand on the wheel. The little boat lurched about and nosed northward. The girl clutched at the companion hood for support. He waved her toward the upholstered rail seat.

"Sit down, won't you?" he invited her politely.

She shook her head. She saw that they were leaving the jagged abutment of the island and heading, not for the peaks and spires which she had come to consider the gateway of the city, but upstream and away from them. She began to speak frantically, gesticulating with both hands. When she saw that this had no effect upon the young man, she summoned her English again.

"No! No! I go *there!*"

Her arm shot out toward the Battery.

"Ah!" He seemed relieved. "So that's it, is it? Well, my dear, you see it can't be done. You may eventually get there, you know, but not in the Priscilla—that's the *nom de course* of my gallant bark. In the first place, my franchise wouldn't permit it. In the second, Priscilla wouldn't care to take a chance. Understand, I don't refuse just to be mean, but it can't be done. It would be like parking your boat in the middle of Times Square, understand? No? *Comprenez-vous?* No?" He scratched his head thoughtfully. "*Nicht wahr?*"

The girl continued to gesticulate and chatter unintelligibly.

"Serves me right for not studying mythologic Greek," he went on. "That's the best I can do, young lady. You don't speak English, I suppose?"

"A small bit," responded Brazina breathlessly, and pointed again. "I go there!"

"I wouldn't be surprised," he conceded. "Why the deuce didn't you keep right on flying, and light on the Singer Building while you were about it? How much English do you know, Circe?"

"A small bit," repeated Brazina, recognizing the one word and responding promptly.

"Small is right," he muttered. "Surely

one who has mastered the magic art of flying can go where she pleases," he added. "Suppose you take wing, Euterpe! I'll be good after this—I swear it!"

They were shooting rapidly up the Hudson now, past somnolent wharves and shadowy hulks. The pallid young moon had taken refuge behind a cloud, and the lights along the shore blinked feebly.

Her purpose thwarted, Brazina relaxed against the companion hood, clutching the coin tightly in her palm. At least this strange creature was bearing her away from her prison—whither, she did not know, but those unconsidered forces that had lent her impetus to escape would not desert her now.

His purposeful grip on the wheel, and the speed of the boat, told her that the young man had a definite objective. Somewhere he would put into shore. New York was a great city, and probably she would still be within its boundaries.

For his part, the young man at the wheel of the trig little launch was conscious of but one desire—to make his club wharf as quickly as possible, and to hear again the reassuring sound of a friendly voice. An evening of cards and post-prohibition festivity had resulted in the present fuddled state of his mind—had resulted, too, in his ardent desire for a midnight cruise before retiring. His companions had refused to accompany him, and he had embarked alone, his voice raised defiantly in a song that had to do with the moon and the midnight seas.

He was not certain, now, where he had been. He was not, as a matter of fact, quite certain of anything—least of all of that grotesquely garbed figure balancing herself near the companion hatch of his boat. She was better—much better, he decided—than pink rabbits and purple elephants, of which he had heard, but she *was* disconcerting.

The wind ballooned the wide skirt and white sleeves of her ridiculous costume, until it seemed as if she held herself to the deck of the boat by sheer physical force. He wished heartily that she wouldn't—that she would let go and float away into the night as she had come.

Underlying this bemused speculation was the vague suspicion that the girl might be real. This possibility was none too reassuring. If she was real, where had she come from? Why was she dressed like that? What was she doing in his boat?

Better, he concluded hazily, to accept the other alternative, and to modify his future conduct accordingly.

As he sighted the jutting outline of a pier ahead, he muttered darkly:

"Now we'll see!"

He nosed his boat inshore. The sight of the clubhouse, with its upper windows still glowing, lent him new courage. He leaped out, made his boat fast to the pier, and turned toward Brazina. She was standing uncertainly where he had left her. Swaying slightly, he stepped forward, his hand outstretched.

"Permit me, fair one!"

But the girl's glance went past his gallantly bending figure to the clubhouse, and beyond that to the reach of sprinkled darkness which was the city—her city. She ignored his hand, and leaped lightly out beside him. She was giddy now, athrill with fear.

The man backed swiftly down the pier, which terminated in a broad terrace before the club, and she followed. Once on the terrace, the light from the upper windows struck full on both of them. Brazina saw a tall young man with rumpled light hair and pleasant face, though the eyes staring at her were somewhat blurred. She was aware that she should thank him, but the English words had escaped her, and her throat was too hot and full for speech.

She thought of the card, and of Macha Sladeck, whom she must find. If she could ask this young man, perhaps he would direct her.

It was at this moment that he lurched toward her, stammering words that sounded almost like an imprecation. She backed away from him, a new and very present fear blotting out all others; but he followed her, and she felt him touch her lightly on the shoulder. He was talking incoherently.

"Then you are real! Don't be afraid! Holy cats, who are you? What's this?"

It was the coin again. She was thrusting it at him desperately.

"I don't want that. Tell me, where did you come from? Oh, well, all right—I'll take it!"

He continued to press toward her until she was close to the wall of the house. There she stood, her lips parted, her breath coming short and fast, her hands clasped over her wild heart. He continued to jabber unintelligible bits of speech, growing momentarily more frantic.

Then he lifted his voice toward the lighted windows upstairs, from which came faintly the sound of masculine guffaws:

"Oh, Jim! Hey, you fellows! Blake, I say!"

When he realized that they had not heard him, he took two strides toward the door. Then he turned back to her and gasped out an admonition, which he emphasized with an upraised hand:

"Stay right her! Don't move! I'll be right back—do you understand? Oh, Lord, why can't you talk!"

He went through the motions of going upstairs and coming down, pointed to the lighted windows, and made the door and the flight of stairs in half a dozen strides.

Brazina had understood his gestures perfectly. He had cautioned her to remain where she was. He would be back.

She stood motionless for a moment, powerless to move, robbed of all volition by her terror. She knew now that she had thought of the city with a sort of heedless ecstasy, as a place strange but unterrifying. The cause of her terror was the curious behavior of the man who had just left her, not the mysterious, night-swathed city spreading all about her.

Into a room hazy with smoke, which rose from a quartet of figures grouped about a card table, the master of the Priscilla burst.

"Didn't you hear me call you? Come down here, quick! I want to show you something I've got! Hurry, you darned fools!"

The man dealing the cards threw a casual greeting over his shoulder, and another announced that he'd take two, if the dealer didn't mind.

"Hello there, Cart! How's your moon, boy?" said a third jovially.

"If it ain't the old Charter Oak back again!" chuckled the fourth.

The young man of the boat stood in the doorway for another instant. He was jibbering uselessly. Then he leaped into the room, lifted his foot, and sent the flimsy table teetering across the floor.

"Come on, I tell you! Can't you see I'm serious?"

"For the love of Pete—"

"That was my ante, too!"

"Darn you, Cart, I'll—"

"Shut up and come down here, I tell you!"

He was propelling one of the men before

him. The others followed, yawning resignedly, pulling on their coats as they went.

"Got something, have you?"

"I hope it's better than that last stuff you contributed, kid!"

"What 'd you do—rob a rum patrol?"

"Never do know what you'll catch when you go out baited up like you were, Cart!"

They filed out on the stone terrace, chuckling, blinking sleepy eyes like children wakened suddenly. They watched the young man rushing frantically about the terrace, tacking off across the lawn, and peering into shadowed corners.

"What's the matter, Cart? Can't you find it?"

"Should have chained it down, you know!"

He came back to them, his hands pumping up and down with excitement, stuttering, cursing them for standing there and making no move to join in the search.

"She's gone!" he cried. "She was right there a minute ago. I told her to stay right there!"

"She!"

"Who?"

"The girl. She came into my boat. You never, *never* saw anything like her!" He was panting, his words tumbling over one another. "She was uncanny—so lovely! You never—look, will you? I've got to find her!"

But they stood grinning at him.

"Lovely girl, eh?"

"Who was she, Cart?"

"God knows—but she was real—all gold and crimson and *light*! Her clothes—odd they were, but marvelous! Help me look, I tell you!"

He disappeared around the corner of the club, and came panting back, to find them lighting fresh cigarettes.

"You don't believe me," he accused them frenziedly. "You think I'm drunk. Well, I was, but I'm sober enough now. I tell you she was real, and now she's gone!"

"Sure we believe you, Cart, old boy!"

"What color were her eyes, Cart?"

"Golden," he said savagely. "Yes, they were."

"I'll bet she had natural pink hair!"

"And now she's gone! She couldn't speak a word of English!"

"They never can, kid!"

"I tell you"—he advanced upon them

fiercely—"she was real. She came into my boat from God knows where—just dropped into it out of the sky. She wanted to go to the Woolworth Building, or maybe to the Aquarium—somewhere down town. She was real—I'll prove it to you! I swear I'll find her, if I perish in the attempt! I'll find her, I tell you!"

"Sure you will," soothed one of the men; "but right now it wouldn't be a bad idea to get home and hit the hay. Come along! Where's your car?"

But the younger man had dived into his pocket. He was cool now. He stepped into the lighted hall.

"Come in here, you damned cynics! Maybe you'll believe me now!"

They filed inside, to humor him, and bent over his outstretched hand. In the palm lay a small gold coin of a design none of them had ever seen before.

VI

WHEN Brazina fled into the night, she obeyed a latent instinct of self-preservation. It was better to risk the intangible hazards of the vast, unknown city than the direct menace that lay in the startled eyes of her chance rescuer.

Reaching all about her, dark, mysterious, lay the city; but as she ran, blindly, swiftly, with her short, full skirts caught up in both hands, she was not afraid. The same potent forces that had befriended her in her extremity were still at work. Not for a moment had she lost the sense of her father's beneficent presence.

When she came out into Riverside Drive, with its bending trees and torches of light, she paused, to gaze in gaping wonder at the colossal wall of apartment houses. Here and there light poured forth through impalpable curtains, and she caught glimpses of gilt and marble foyers that were like the entrances to the palaces of fairy tales. A thin stream of motors flowed past, panting softly. A pair of late lovers whispered together on a near-by bench.

Brazina stood in the shadow of a tree, uncertain of her next step. Now that the threat of immediate danger was lifted, she was terribly oppressed by the loneliness of her position.

As she stood there, an enterprising taxi driver, rolling slowly down town, descried her and wheeled in to the curb. Brazina came out of the shadow, reassured by his businesslike tone and his upraised hand.

The car and the gesture were not unfamiliar to her. In Lemberg, where she had often been with her father, there had been public vehicles not materially unlike this one.

As he saw her move toward the car, the driver flung open the door. His habitual air of indifference lifted for a moment at sight of her costume, but his surprise was only momentary. He was a thorough cosmopolite who, in his ambulatory existence, had drawn many a *grande dame* in wig and brocade, many a festive shepherdess with her beflowered crook. Midnight was the witching hour for costumes.

Not a little proud of his nonchalance, he bent over the card she held out to him, read the address, and nodded. Then he slammed the door on his bizarre fare and shot forward.

Inside the car, Brazina balanced herself, straight and breathless, on the edge of the seat. Her hands were clasped tightly in her lap, her gaze leaped out toward the panorama whirling past her. She was devoutly grateful that there had been no necessity for speech, for her throat was choked.

When the car turned out of Seventy-Second Street, she shrank back from the sudden glare of light that struck the windows, and peered fearfully at sidewalks enlivened by home-going pedestrians; at broad show windows richly draped, behind whose plate glass shone incredible splendors. Ahead, Broadway was still agleam, and Brazina glimpsed its aerial electric miracles with fascinated awe.

Their way led past Times Square to the upper Thirties, that amorphous bit of New York where the old century and the new meet and mingle, where the pretentious elegance of some tall, showy-fronted apartment house stands cheek by jowl against a derelict brownstone residence of Victorian vintage, now converted into dingy shops. Here *Marguerite's* wig, newly renovated and plaited, or a Spanish *mantilla*, slightly musty, may be rented, on occasion, for so much a night and a modest deposit to insure its safe return. Here new brass, deftly aged, may be purchased by the antique hunter; an umbrella rehandled up to date; a photograph made while you wait.

The shops were dark now, the window wares looking out gloomily through dirt-befogged glass. The cab wheeled past them, and came to a stop before an apart-

ment house that stood, tall and slender, between two of the sagging old buildings. The driver leaned back to throw the door of his cab open, and Brazina stepped gingerly out, her heart pumping hard and fast.

From the doorway of the apartment house a weak electric bulb gleamed, and to this she pointed questioningly. The driver yawned, nodded, and twisted about to read the meter.

"One forty," he said dispassionately.

Brazina had extricated another gold coin from the precious wallet. The driver was reaching mechanically for change as she handed it to him. Holding the coin in his hand, he scrutinized it. Then, seeing the girl turning away, he hailed her sharply.

"Hey, you! I said one forty! This ain't—say, none of your tricks! This money's phony!"

She turned back to him, bewildered, frightened. The glare from an arc light picked out the sheen on her black boots and the crisp white of her kerchief. The driver was scolding her petulantly, making ready to climb down.

"None of your tricks!" he was saying.

To Brazina his voice carried an unmistakable threat. He was complaining of the money she had given him, yet it must be enough.

A man swung round the corner and came toward them down the shadowed street. The driver of the cab, a heavy man, was climbing laboriously to the sidewalk. The girl was filled with sudden dread—dread of unknown terrors, of the oncoming pedestrian, of the driver's voice, and, most of all, of the unknown allies that voice might summon. Only for a second she hesitated; then she turned and fled through the grilled door of the apartment house.

The foyer was long, narrow, and dimly lit. At the extreme end was an elevator well. The car door was open, and dozing in a chair beside it sat an old man with tarnished brass buttons on his coat. Brazina did not see that he was old. In one frenzied glance she saw only the double row of buttons that marked him as a fellow of those attendants who kept guard outside the detention rooms of the island prison from which she had just escaped. Then she saw the staircase leading upward behind the elevator shaft.

She had disappeared when the driver stamped inside, muttering profanely. The venerable custodian of the elevator was

roused by the pursuer's purposeful tread and belligerent voice. He leaped to his feet, promptly on the defensive in case he should be accused of napping at his post.

"What does she think I am?" the driver was demanding hotly. "They can't try it on me! Where is she?"

"Sir?" interrogated the brass-buttoned one politely.

"Where is she? Where did she go?"

The elevator man, now sufficiently awake to see that the questioner was a stranger, and immensely relieved to find that it was not one of the tenants, replied gruffly:

"Where did who go? What are you talking about?"

"Oh, you know—the dame in the fancy get-up! Say!" The invader advanced threateningly. "Don't *you* try it on, neither! Come across—where did she go?"

"I don't know what you're talking about. Nobody's been in here for an hour."

"Say, what do you think I am?" sneered the driver. "Didn't I bring her here myself? Didn't I see her go in?"

"If you did, you got better eyes than me," the elevator man said with elaborate sarcasm. "There ain't been any one in here for an hour."

The driver raised his arm threateningly.

"Say, don't you get fresh with me! I tell you—"

"Wouldn't I 'a' seen 'em?" demanded the other. "Ain't I been here all the time?"

The driver's assurance began to waver. There was no mistaking the genuineness of the old man's anger.

"Well, damn it, I brought her here." He held out the coin disgustedly. "I may be dumb, but I ain't blind. Look at this! She give it to me for her fare."

"It's furrin," decided the elevator man, eying the coin knowingly.

"No! Say, ain't you cute, now?" observed the driver scathingly. "Of course I never would 'a' guessed it!"

"Well, no one's been in here." The elevator man scratched his head reflectively. "Maybe she went in next door. There's a bunch of queer nuts hangs out there." He brightened. "Maybe that there money's worth something."

The driver considered both these suggestions, his eyes narrowing. Then he made for the door.

"That's like 'em—tell you to go to one

place, and then sneak in somewhere else. Well, I'd like to see 'em try such a trick on me again! I—"

The impetus of that pronoun carried him through the door. The elevator man went back to his chair, musing on the inexplicable paradoxes of life. He yawned, settled himself comfortably, with his back to the grilled frame of the elevator well, reached for a cigarette, and looked at his watch instead. Nearly two o'clock, and the day man came on at seven. Five hours more to wait! He yawned again.

The sound of the altercation had followed Brazina in her fevered climb. What the apartment house lacked in ground space was compensated for in height. The stairs twisted upward past a series of square landings, each a duplicate of the one beneath it, with a quartet of blank metal doors cut into the walls and a frosted bulb set in the center of the ceiling.

Halfway up the last flight she was stopped by a closed door, heavily bolted. Here she stood at bay, the fierce thumping of her heart shaking her body, her tongue and lips parched; but there was no sound of pursuing footsteps. Only the subdued hum of the city came to Brazina's ears; and after an eternity of waiting she crept down to the landing directly beneath her.

She stood there for a moment, gazing at the four doors—two on either side. It was confusing to see so many doors. She was assailed by the fear that one of them might suddenly open to emit still another lurking enemy.

It was this terrifying possibility that sent her stealthily toward the nearest door, which bore a small white card set in a brass frame. There were English letters on the card, and she compared them eagerly with those on the precious pasteboard in her hand. Instinctively she realized that when she found the duplicate of that card, she would find sanctuary.

Each door, she discovered, as she moved softly over the tiled floor, had its own little label. Each label differed from the others and from the one she held.

Very cautiously she started down another flight. Once more she made the round of the doors. Before the last one of the four she halted in an ecstasy of relief that threatened to smother her. The name on the door was the same, letter for letter, as the name on the card in her hand.

Her fingers were icy as she tapped lightly

on the door. Small as it was, the sound echoed hollowly in the hall until it seemed as if it must penetrate to the very walls of the city. She drew back fearfully, poised for flight; but silence smothered the echo, and after a moment she knocked again. Once more the sound reverberated up and down the staircase and elevator well, a strident clarion proclaiming her escape.

Pressed tightly against the door, she waited, sustained by the thought that Macha Sladeck would open to her, that she would find refuge from her pursuers and comfort in the sound of her own tongue; but another eternity passed with no response to her knock.

For the first time, it occurred to Brazina that the man she sought might not be at home. This possibility filled her with new alarm. She felt that she was in constant danger, but all that she could do was to wait for Sladeck's return. She shrank back against the door. She stood until the balls of her feet took fire from fatigue; then she sat down and cuddled close against the door, the wide folds of her crimson skirt billowing about her.

The tiled walls and blank doors seemed to stare down at her with stolid indifference. Outside, the city rumbled sleepily. Her fear diminished. The very silence, strange and desolate though it was, reassured her. Presently Macha Sladeck would return, and would open the door to her. Through it she would follow the bright outline of her dream—a dream no longer nebulous but clear and close and dazzling.

She would be free, and the great city would acclaim her, even as the old ballet master had prophesied. Indeed, that dream was her most precious heritage from him. She would nurse it to sublime reality.

Her eyes were fixed on the frosted bulb in the ceiling. As she looked, it seemed to flicker and shrink until, like a sleepily winking eye, it winked itself out altogether.

VII

THOUGH born of humble peasants in an impoverished village outside of Kosice, Macha Sladeck considered himself a thorough American. Not yet thirty, he had the stooped, narrow shoulders and stunted stature of a squalid and improvident youth. What vitality he had brought to his maturity was centered in a pair of small, piercing black eyes set close to a thin, humped nose, beneath brows that met in a hairy V.

Men of his type abound on the crowded pavements between Thirty-Fourth Street and Columbus Circle—dapper, shrewd, tireless, avidly ambitious; capable of any self-denial that tends to contribute to ultimate success; talking and acting that success long before its realization.

Macha Sladeck was perhaps superior to most of his fellows in that never for a moment had he altered the fixed purpose of his life. That purpose had been born when, at fourteen, he had become an usher at a theater in Bratislava. From the first, the stage and its fascinating hazards had lured him, but even then he had been shrewd enough to recognize his own artistic limitations. At the same time, he was quick to see that the artists whom he admired and envied were incompetent in business matters. To exploit that incompetence to his own advantage seemed to him a singularly fair division of talents. Thus his ambition to become a vender of art, and thereby a part of its glamour, had become the salient *motif* of his life.

So close had he come to success through artful juggling of the frayed fortunes that fate tossed within his reach, that his was one of a trio of names gold-leafed on the door of a murky little office around a corner from Times Square. Here he and his partners dealt with mediocre talent, and with the secondary vaudeville circuits that enlisted it.

He was a familiar figure along the Rialto, given to striped suits, colorful cravats, and shiny buttoned shoes. During his seven years in America he had acquired a practical knowledge of English that included a scholarly rhetoric as well as the more useful Broadway idioms. His little black eyes always seemed to be leaping ahead of his thoughts, just as his thoughts were forever leaping ahead from his dingy little office to the sumptuous suite of which he dreamed—just as the gold-leaf inscription on his door was forever metamorphosing itself into twinkling electric letters over a theater of his own. He lived alone in a small two-room apartment, for he had long ago discovered that dreams thrive best in solitude.

His recent trip abroad, ostensibly to visit an aged mother and father, had not been undertaken with that worthy objective alone. Already he was on the alert for that *coup de théâtre* which should net him his dream entire. Macha Sladeck knew his Broadway, knew that its assumption of

satiety was but a thin veneer overlying a naïve eagerness for new toys. He had seen other venders of mediocre art trade their wares year after year, and then mount to glowing triumph in the wake of some newly unearthed novelty.

It was for such a phenomenon that his eyes were constantly searching. Once his filial duties had been disposed of, his quest had carried him through the new boundaries of Czechoslovakia and Poland, and into the virgin reaches of the Carpathians; but if the genius that he sought was here, it was submerged in the débris of post-war depression. Depressed himself, he had taken passage back to New York.

It was aboard the steamer that he had caught a glimpse of that St. Elmo's fire which glows on the mental horizon of every theatrical manager.

Brazina Laborga's first claim to his attention had been her unique and startling beauty; but he was given to no heady enthusiasms on this score. The prodigality of beauty in the city of his adoption, and its consequent drop in market value, rendered beauty alone a poor investment indeed. Then he had seen her dance, and had recognized in her that rare and potent force which appears once in a generation, to restore the world's waning credence in genius.

That he should have glimpsed the phenomenon he had been seeking only to find it beyond his reach was perhaps the hardest blow Macha Sladeck had ever received. He knew, once he had talked to the ballet master, that the girl was not for him.

Old Kramar Laborga, despite his gentle ineffectiveness, had displayed no gullible meekness in regard to his daughter. The fact that he was bringing her and her genius to a market which was unknown to him, and which was already abundantly supplied, had not intimidated him as Macha Sladeck had hoped.

The ballet master was as coolly and calmly aware of the girl's talent as Sladeck. That she would amply fulfill the old man's hopes for her, the latter had not the slightest doubt. That he would gain nothing by this certainty filled him with bitterness. His friendly overtures to the old Ruthenian had been politely repulsed. Laborga, despite his linguistic handicap and his limited experience, was no fool.

Since his return to America, Macha Sladeck had nursed a feeble hope that the old

man and his daughter might utilize the card he had left with them. They might at least come to him for advice. He had been careful to give them a personal card bearing his home address, so that, if fortune favored him, he would not be forced to share honor and gain with his partners.

With the passing days this feeble hope had dwindled and his bitterness had increased. He cursed Kramar Laborga's shrewd insight, even while he admired it.

One morning, a fortnight after his arrival, as he was dressing, it seemed to him that his routine, since that encounter aboard the steamer, had been more than ever dull and profitless. The picture of Brazina pulsating to the barbaric rhythm of the concertina stayed in his mind and mocked him. He was like a man looking into a richly bedecked show window whose wares he can never possess.

As he dressed that morning, he was wondering about the Ruthenian girl with a sort of weary rancor. Unlike his less forward-looking fellows, he made it a point to start his day early, going out at eight for coffee and rolls to a cheap café near by. Despite the early hour, he was shaved and dressed carefully, with a purple-bordered handkerchief making a gay triangle against his gray coat, as he strode down the dark little hall.

He opened the door briskly. Then he started back with a sharp oath as a limp bundle of crimson and gayly flowered muslin tumbled across the door sill at his feet.

"What the devil? Who—what do you want?"

There was an inarticulate sound from the huddle on the floor as Brazina Laborga drew herself to a sitting posture and moved her head dazedly from side to side, blinking in the dim light of the hall. The next instant she had scrambled to her feet, and Macha Sladeck had her by both hands, words tumbling from his lips.

"Why, it's Brazina Laborga! How on earth did you get here? Why didn't you ring? My dear girl, what is it? There now—it's all right!"

The beloved sound of her mother tongue, the sight of his face, the almost frenzied welcome in his little black eyes—the girl's poise could not hold under these. She lifted her hands and shoulders in a gesture of ineffable relief.

"I have come—ah!"

With one arm about her shaking shoul-

ders, Sladeck closed the door softly and led her down the hall to his living room, his words trickling out in broken sentences of reassurance.

"There, there—don't cry! I tell you you are safe. Don't cry!" He led her to a worn leather couch and drew her gently down, with his arm still about her shoulders. "Well, then, cry if you must, child. Here—take this."

The purple-bordered handkerchief was a damp ball when at last she took it away from her eyes and looked up into Sladeck's face with reddened, tear-drenched eyes.

"My father told me to come to you, and so, you see, I am here."

"Yes, yes—of course!" He patted her shoulder. "You had a hard time finding me, eh? Your father—where is he, then?"

She spread her hands, palms upward. It was a characteristic gesture which he was to know very well.

"Then you did not know that he—had gone? You did not know?"

The fatigue of that night, the bleak tragedy and grief that lay behind it, were written for him to read in the face lifted to his. Macha Sladeck had cause to remember that face. It was his brightest dream embodied; but it was not that of the beautiful child aboard the steamer. The high color was gone. Maturity was in the wistful droop of the girl's lips, and a new ascetic delicacy in the contours of her face.

"Gone!" Macha Sladeck repeated wonderingly. "You mean they sent him back?"

"Do you think he would permit that?" she demanded quickly, and put her wet handkerchief to her eyes. "No—he is dead, my father."

She had made a ludicrous picture huddled there at his feet, a few moments before, in the bizarre costume of her native country; but she was no longer ludicrous now. Her grief spent, she told him her story calmly, rapidly, her slender, facile hands emphasizing her words.

Sladeck found it increasingly difficult to concentrate on the details. The fact of her father's death kept recurring like a favored theme into the emotional symphony of Brazina's recital. The ballet master was dead—the girl had come to him!

Her story of her escape quieted that exultant voice for a moment. It was a terrible assault on his credulity. His eagerness sharpened his features as he listened.

"But where did this boat that you speak of come from? How did he happen to bring you away from the island? How did you make yourself understood?"

She went over it carefully. To her mind, the tale comprised a chain of providential but perfectly practical incidents. To the man, inculcated with the skepticism of Broadway, it smacked of incredible romance. Eventually he linked it with reality, preposterous as it was—the lucky chance that had brought the meandering little craft to the very walls of Ellis Island; the intoxicated yachtsman; the blasé taxi driver; most of all, the blind faith of the girl whose simplicity had been her best ally.

"He was not satisfied with the money I gave him, that cabman," she said. "He began to shout—about what I do not know. I ran. The officer downstairs, he was asleep, and he did not see me."

Officer! Macha Sladeck's thoughts flew to the supine and inoffensive eparch of the elevator, but he did not smile. His fervid speculations were already far ahead of the girl's eerie story. His mind was already bending her innate superstition, and her fear of "officers," into the channel of his great ambition.

When she ceased speaking, he was unaware of what her last word had been, but he summoned a warm sympathy into his voice, poured out solicitous phrases, and patted the quiescent hands in her lap.

"You must try to forget all these trials," he told her. "As you say, you are here. It is right that you should have come to me, but you must rest, and you are hungry. Yes, you must be! I shall attend to that." He smiled his reassurance into her eyes. "I shall have to go out and buy you some breakfast. You see, I do no cooking here, ordinarily. You will wait here for me. I shall only be a moment, and then we shall have a pleasant breakfast together, and after that we shall talk." He moved toward the door, and turned to smile back at her. "You will not be afraid? Of course not. I shall be a moment only."

He carried the picture of her with him—the lovely, bizarre figure on his shoddy leather couch, the terrible pathos of her quiescence. Not for a moment had he betrayed the volcanic emotions that her appearance at his door had aroused in his breast. He had accepted her story with an air of calm credence. He had seemed

to concede his own belief in those mystical forces to which she attributed her escape.

Inwardly, however, he had never been less calm. The fates had brought to his very door the prodigy of his dreams—such a prodigy of beauty and talent as the world produces once in a generation. He paid for his purchases at the delicatessen shop around the corner with fingers that were moist and unsteady; but not once did his exultation clog the swiftly running current of his calculations.

He hurried back to his apartment and exchanged a jocular greeting with the elevator man:

"Turning cook, you see!"

"You do get darned tired of this restaurant stuff," replied the operator—the day man, who came on duty at seven o'clock.

When she heard Sladeck's key in the lock, Brazina's startled glance became a wan smile of welcome.

"You see, I was not more than a moment," he boasted. "Now wait and see what a breakfast I shall cook for you!"

He bustled into the dark little kitchenette, after hanging his coat on the back of a chair and tucking his purple shirt sleeves higher under gaudy armlets. He put coffee on to boil, warmed some rolls, and fried eggs, all the time chatting easily through the open door.

"See how much brighter things will look when you have eaten!" he said lightly.

Over the table that he had hastily spread beside the leather couch, the girl's eyes regarded him gratefully.

"You are very kind to me—very kind!"

"Bah! How else should I be? It is nothing! My heart bleeds for you, poor child. Come, come—you are not eating!"

She had not been conscious of hunger. Now she ate dutifully, and the hot coffee coaxed a faint color into her cheeks.

"Fine!" he applauded.

He refilled her cup and gave her another warm roll. Her exhaustion began to lift. On its heels came a sense of her critical situation and of the necessity for action. A gentle dignity had replaced her panic.

"I can see that already you are feeling better," he said jovially.

"Yes, and I am so grateful to you," she told him. "I have imposed, I'm afraid, but I shall pay you for your trouble." He made a protesting gesture, but she hurried on. "Ah, you will have to let me do that! I shall want your help, your advice—"

The gracious dignity of her voice and manner was a direct heritage from the old ballet master.

A wave of resentment surged through Macha Sladeck. Pay him! Did she think that this meeting would amount to no more than that? Did she know her own power, as her father had known it? This was not the talk of a stranded and fugitive peasant girl!

He spoke suavely, though his eyes were narrow.

"You must not speak of pay," he said. "That is a word that should not pass between us, my dear. Besides"—he shrugged—"this is a situation where your money will be of small use to you."

"But I have a great deal—several hundred crowns," she said gravely. "I can afford to pay my way until I begin to earn, and then I shall be rich."

"Rich! Ah!" His lips lifted in an incredulous smile. "That shows how little you know of America—of New York. It is a great city, the richest in the world. All the greatest artists living are gathered here, each vying for a place above the other, and hundreds swarm the streets looking for work—starving, even. It is not the simple matter you may imagine."

"I know," she said, nodding soberly, but Sladeck could see that she was unimpressed. "That is why my father did not bring me to America sooner. He always told me that the staircase to fame is crowded because the artists had not learned how to climb properly." She spread her hands and smiled across at him. "I am ready," she said simply.

"But," he dryly reminded her, "your father had never been in New York. You dance well—yes, but you have not the prestige of a reputation. You have had no experience."

"But yes!"

"Slight, perhaps," he conceded kindly; "but what is an appearance in the ballet corps at Lemberg? Your father's ardor to keep you fresh for New York defeated his own ends. However"—he shrugged again, and tapped a cigarette on his thumb nail—"all that is in the future. Perhaps I can arrange something—if we can manage to keep you here."

He had a moment of triumph when he saw the swift alarm in her eyes.

"Keep me! But I am here! They did not see me come. They did not find me."

He saw that she had believed herself safe, once there were no visible pursuers.

"My dear child, you are a fugitive from the law. I know that you believe you have done no wrong, but unfortunately the authorities will not see it through your eyes—or mine. They believed that they had cause to deport you. Your escape does not alter that." He pursed his thin lips reflectively. "As a matter of fact, it makes things worse. It makes you an undesirable. You have broken a law, and that puts you in the criminal class. So long as you are in America, you are a fugitive."

"You mean—you mean they will search for me?"

Both hands were clasped over her heart now, and terror once more widened her eyes. Sladeck nodded gloomily.

"But they did not follow—they would not find me now!"

"Now or later, it will be the same to them," he said. "You have broken a law."

"But no—you are wrong! You must be wrong! I have only come into the country, and it is a free country!"

"Not for a fugitive."

"But my father said so! They were kind to me. It was just that they did not understand. They thought I was too young—that was all. I could not make them understand—"

"Nor could you now," he interrupted.

"It is the law!"

"They would have deported me."

"And they still have that right, if they discover you."

"But they cannot!"

It was a terror-stricken entreaty.

"They are very clever," Sladeck said thoughtfully, "and they never tire."

For a long moment the girl stared past him bleakly, while his selfish hopes fattened on her despair. Once, as a child, he had focused a pencil of blazing sun through a bit of broken glass on a sunflower, and had watched the tender petals wither. So now he watched Brazina, tensed there on his leather couch.

The silence between them became an almost tangible menace to the girl. She broke it desperately.

"My father gave his life that I might be free!" she cried.

Macha Sladeck kindled a cigarette. He was a little shaken by that. Such human sacrifice smacked of ancient Spartanism, as discomforting to think of as it was prepos-

terous to practice. It was no business of his if a half crazed old man wanted to drown himself in the harbor. The girl was his business. He spoke as if he had not heard her.

"Of course it will be simple for them to trace you here," he said. "It is not safe for you to stay."

It robbed her of the last vestige of courage. She flung out her hands abjectly.

"What, then, am I to do?"

He seemed lost for a moment in gloomy reflection. Then, as if with sudden resolve, he bent toward her and patted her hand.

"Perhaps I can manage to throw them off the track. I, too, am clever in my little way—not so clever as the law, perhaps, but I can do my small best, eh?"

Light was flickering back into her lusterless eyes.

"But if you do that, will you not get into trouble, too? I should not want that."

"I? Ah, well!" His tone admitted the possibility; the nonchalant shrug conveyed his indifference. "What if I do? It cannot be helped. You are alone—in distress. We were nursed at the breast of the same country. I know that they were wrong, these dense ones who would deport you."

He bounced out of his chair with every semblance of a newborn enthusiasm.

"Come!" he said cheerfully. "We shall not despair—not yet. If we can outwit them, it will be no more than justice."

Brazina sprang up, her face suffused with sudden color.

"Justice—only that!" she cried. "Justice to my father! Ah, think how grateful he would be if he were here!"

"Careful, careful!" Sladeck had a paternal air. "We must not be too certain of success. We shall have to step softly and slowly. I shall have to plan carefully, if we are to evade this law."

"But we will—we will!"

The plural pronoun was the girl's unconscious subscription to his own plans. He became very grave, his forehead knitting portentously.

"They can trace you here easily enough through the young man of the boat and the taxi driver." He glanced at the billowing skirt and shiny boots. "Your costume makes it easier. Why—"

"It was in the costume of my poor country that my father meant to present me," she told him quietly. "I was but following his wishes."

"Yes, yes, of course! It was a pretty thought, but impractical. I shall have to get you clothes and find you a place to stay."

He paced the small room, his hands thrust deep in his pockets. He was a magnificent plenipotentiary on the brink of a vast enterprise. He would have been genuinely surprised had he passed a mirror at the moment, and caught sight of the meager figure in shirt sleeves and beribboned armlets; but there was no mirror to retard his pleasant expansion. He tossed broken phrases to Brazina as he paced:

"I shall have to get you out of here after dark. No one saw you come in—that's lucky! I must take the size of your clothes. I think I can find you a place near by."

The shadows about the girl were lifting. Her eyes were glowing, like russet pools shot through with gold.

"My heart shall never cease to beat with gratitude for you," she said softly.

"Pooh! It is nothing!" He came and stood before her. "But you must leave everything to me—everything. You understand?" She nodded quickly. "And now I must go. There is much to be done."

He warned her to respond to no bells and to admit no one, and advised her to lie down until his return.

"You must be very tired," he told her. "I shall try not to be long."

He bustled out of the room, after further admonitions.

In the hall, as he waited for the elevator, he spread his narrow chest and exhaled deeply. His body was tingling as if from a potent intoxicant. Not only had fate, in an unguarded moment, dropped a priceless gem on his doorstep, but it had also provided him with the means whereby he might keep it for himself alone. The girl

had come to him. He was her only refuge in the great, strange city.

He might, of course, have gone on her bond; but there was no upsurging of guilt at this thought. That had, indeed, been his first decision upon hearing her story; but to go on her bond meant that she would be free.

With that keen, alert instinct which served him in lieu of reflective philosophy, he had known that, once free, she would escape him. The impalpable wings of Brazina Laborga's genius would carry her aloft where he could never hope to follow. By welding her to him by fear and gratitude, he would share her flight.

When he had left her, Brazina did not move from her place on the worn leather couch until her cramped muscles demanded relief. She rose timidly, half afraid to move, and tiptoed to the window.

Outside was a triangle of dirty walls perforated with narrow windows. Below, the stained and dusty leaves of a lone ailanthus tree struggled up out of a cramped little yard. Beyond lay a labyrinth of painted tin roofs and gaunt chimneys, and beyond these the conical peak of a tall building.

She stood there for a long moment, a bright anachronism in her bodice and skirt of crimson, her kerchief, and her shiny boots. The elation that had succeeded her despair would not hold against the bleak solitude now crowding in upon her—a solitude filled with sinister threats.

Was it for this that her father had given his life? Was it for this that she had escaped from her prison?

Escaped! After all, she had not escaped. She was still a prisoner for whom there was no escape. Macha Sladeck's mission, kindly intentioned though it seemed to be, was but to find her a more secure retreat from her pursuers.

(To be continued in the December number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

SONG STUFF

ANY one can make a song,
If the song is in them;
Things are lying all about,
Waiting us to sing them.

Even though a thousand times
They've been sung,
For the master of new rimes
They're still young.

Richard Leigh

Maw

THE STORY OF A HISTORIC AMERICAN TYPE, THE PIONEER WOMAN

By Myron Brinig

MAW was Rosaline Jenkins, the prettiest girl in Clarkston, Vermont, and Paw was Joe Redfern. "Good for nothing" was what they called Paw. When he should have been on the farm doing his chores—milking the cow, or greasing the wagon wheels, or chopping wood, or painting the barn—he was hanging around the drug store and making eyes at the pretty girls who came to town on shopping trips.

Paw was a handsome fellow. His good looks drew the girls to his side, smiling and flirtatious, but his laziness frightened them. They knew it was a hard enough job to make a living out of Vermont soil without fooling around the drug store. A young fellow like Joe Redfern, it was said, ought to be planning for the future, instead of gallivanting around and looking handsome. Did he think he was a rich man's son?

If Clarkston had only realized that Joe Redfern was a romantic adventurer without a stage on which to enact his rôle, things in general might have gone easier with him. He had a large album of colorful dreams packed into his imagination, about which Clarkston knew nothing. Only Rosaline knew what was going on in Joe's mind. She had the peculiar intuition that accompanies love.

When Calvin Redfern, Joe's father, ordered his idling son out of the house, telling the boy to go out into the world and make his own living, Joe sought out Rosaline and asked her to marry him.

"We'll go out to California, where there's lots of gold," said Joe, giving free rein to his imagination. "I got a letter from Pete Bergstrom—you remember him, Rosie; he used to be a clerk in the drug store. He writes that he's struck it rich, and he's building a house on Nob Hill, in Frisco. The West is the place for young

people with ambition, like you an' me, Rosie!"

Maw used to say, years afterward:

"He stood there in front o' me, with those big gray eyes o' his lookin' straight into my heart, as if they was readin' all my secrets, an' he looked so young and strong that you couldn't 'a' held me back with a team o' horses. A lot I cared what the town thought of him!

"'Sure,' I said, 'I'll marry you, Joe. I'll take the chance.'

"The next minute he had me in his arms, an' I didn't feel nothin' but just warm an' safe. When he kissed me, I could have followed him around the world on stilts. I ran home by the back way, an' packed a couple o' dresses, an' a pair of strong shoes, an' a dozen jars of strawberry jam that I'd canned myself, an' some underthings; an' I met Joe at the railroad station in half an hour. He looked all rosy in the face, an' he acted very bossy, but I didn't mind obeyin'. People didn't know that we was startin' out on a great adventure.

"Well, after a few days we got to Omaha, which was as far as the railroad went in them days; an' believe me, it was like being born all over again. I was nineteen, an' Joe was twenty-one, but we was an old married couple by this time, an' there was nothin' in all that new an' wild country to skeer the likes of us. Ahead, as far as the eye could see, there was nothin' but sun an' dust. Behind was all the things we'd been used to an' loved; but did we stop to cry? Not so's you could notice. California or bust—that was our motto."

II

In Omaha they purchased a camp wagon and two horses, and after a few days they were traveling over the prairies into God alone knew what. The sky was blue with-

out end, and the trail they followed was like a long, hot tomb robbed of its dead. They passed through one-street towns that in the years to come would develop into great commercial centers.

At the end of two months they entered Utah, worn to the bone, and tired of their continual march westward. California was a mythical region somewhere beyond the last cloud that floated, a dreamy island, in the sky.

Joe met up with some kindly disposed Mormon fathers, and they sold him a parcel of land one hundred miles east of Salt Lake City; and here Western Redfern was born, a child of the open sky and the measureless land. They named him in honor of the new country that had been opened, like an unsoiled page, to their wondering gaze. It was an honor to have been born in the vast stillness of an immaculate country; and, like Utah, Western had the beauty of something divinely mysterious in his face. He looked the image of Joe, Maw always said.

She stayed in bed four days, and then she was up and about the little farm. She was thinner than she was before, and the bloom had gone from her cheeks; but you couldn't very well lie abed like a lazybones with all that work to be done, the soil to be tilled, and the house to be put in order. Then, too, there was the son and heir, who refused to be ignored for a moment.

She rose in the morning at six, to get a good start for the day. There was milk to be warmed for West, and there was Joe's breakfast to be prepared—he was grouchy until he filled his stomach. After breakfast the dishes had to be washed and wiped, the kitchen scrubbed, the bedroom put in order. By that time the chickens had to be fed and the baby bathed. Lunch had to be started—Joe ate a big lunch, because he was hungrier at that time of day than he was in the evening.

It was also Maw's custom to go out into the fields and help Joe with the plowing and the weeding. At this time of day the land was like a pan of dough inclosed by the huge oven of the sun. Toward sundown Maw hitched up the horses and drove into Divinity, the nearest town, to do her precarious shopping. It was a five-mile drive each way, and, Lord have mercy on us, it was hot there in Utah!

Driving home again—it was blue evening then—the baby was awake, and was howl-

ing so loud that Maw thought she could hear him a mile away; but he was an angel when you gave him the bottle, and he quieted down into a rosy, remote slumber.

Maw used to sing to her son:

"Oh, Susannah,
Don't you cry fer me,
'Cause I'm goin' out to Oregon,
With my banjo on my knee.
Oh, Susannah,
Don't you cry!"

When Joe came in from the fields, his hands were covered with a layer of black soil, and he smelled of the fresh-plowed earth. His burned arms were bare to the elbows, and Maw tingled when she touched them, they were so alive and electric with strength. Sometimes he would hold his hands under the pump outside until they were cool and clean; but more often he ate just as he was, deep in thought of labors yet to be performed.

"What you got for dinner to-night, Rosie?"

"Oh, some salt pork, an' pudding left over from last night—an' a treat, honey. Remember the jam I used to make back in Vermont that you liked so much you used to smack your lips for an hour after? Well, you're goin' to have some on your bread to-day—real strawberry jam, to remind you of home!"

"Is that brat cryin' again?"

"Don't call your son a brat, Joe Redfern! He's an angel, he is. Ah, there, sweet baby! Paw's goin' to sing to you while Maw's settin' the table. Paw, sing to your son."

Joe took up the lullaby:

"Mammy's in de cornfield,
Takin' it her leis-ure;
An' if she don' look out—my!
De bees dey'll sting her knees, sure!"

"I think that when we make a little money out here in the West, we'll go back to Vermont to live," said Maw. "We'll have our own little house there with vines an' an awning over the front porch, no less. Western, we'll send him to Harvard College, to take up doctoring. There's a lot of money in a profession."

"Plenty of time to think of Vermont when we've licked this country we're in now, Maw," said Joe.

After supper there were more dishes, and Joe did the drying this time. Maw used to poke fun at him.

"You might 'a' married that pretty little Carey girl, 'stead of me—the one with the bright red hair. Remember, Joe?"

"She would 'a' druv me to the poor-house."

"An' then there was that stylish Mabel Monohan, the one who had all her dresses made in Boston."

"I'd 'a' had gray hair by this time, she was such a vixen. Besides, she squinted."

"An' Pearl Moore, the minister's daughter. What about her, Joe?"

"She used to sing hymns through her nose, an' she had freckles. No thank you!"

"I'm not so pretty as I was, Joe. First thing I know, you'll be drivin' into Salt Lake, to be a Mormon with a ha-reem."

"Aha!" winked Joe.

Then he went into the barn, to see that everything was all right with the live stock; and Maw watered the precious geranium and fed the cat and the dog. After a while, Joe would smoke his pipe, and close his eyes, and look like a little boy who has had a hard day. Maw shook him.

"Go to bed, Paw. You ought to know better than to go to sleep in the kitchen."

Paw rose to his feet, and yawned hugely, and lifted his arms, and kicked his legs. In the bedroom he threw his heavy shoes on the floor, making an awful racket.

"Quiet, will you? D'you want another night o' walkin' the floor with that brat o' yours, Joe Redfern?"

"Your son is not a brat, Mrs. Redfern!" returned Joe.

She crept into bed beside him, and after a few minutes he took her in his arms, because he couldn't fall to sleep any other way. The toil of the crowded day, the trouble of raising a child in the wilderness, the poverty—all these things were forgotten then. He was the man she had followed into the unknown, her husband, and she held him close, as if he were another of her children.

"He and my baby are the whole world to me," she would think. "They're mine, mine! I love their eyes, their lips, their bodies, their souls! Oh, both of you, rest your tired heads upon my breast, and I will soothe you to sleep. I will bear your burdens and shoulder your worries!"

The night enveloped them, and the silence barricaded them from reality.

The dawn raced in upon them like a silver stallion with large gray eyes and hoofs

of glinting steel. It was six o'clock almost at once. Paw stirred and yawned heavily, and the bed creaked as he sat up and lifted his legs to the floor. Maw heard him drawing on his socks, his heavy shoes, his overalls. She could hear him out in the yard, splashing his face with clear, cold water, noisily, like a little boy. The pump handle worked up and down, up and down. He frightened the chickens, and they squawked loudly as they fled before his ablutions. The dog barked at his approach, adoringly.

The day began to whirl about Maw's ears. The birds crazed the morning into a thousand melodies. The earth began to take fire. It was delightful to lie abed for a while. The sun crept inch by inch along the kitchen floor, then into the bedroom, up to the bed. When the first golden ray reached her feet, she would arise.

How the bees hummed ardently at their swift, sweet labor! There was the sun now, burning through the bed covers. The baby rubbed his eyes and whimpered with discomfort. Then he let out a loud cry of protest. He was so angry that he kicked his legs vehemently, and the tears shimmered crystal on his fat cheeks.

Maw lifted herself out of bed and pattered to the side of his crib. Her long yellow hair fell over his pillow, and he pulled at the strands furiously.

"Up! Up in my arms, West! My son! Look at him, though! Did you think I'd gone back to Vermont an' left you all alone? Hush! Hush! What a child! His father all over again! Here's your breakfast, darling. Aren't you goin' to kiss mother? Well, I must say you're a contrary child. Your paw ain't so partic'lar. This piggy went to market. This one stayed at home—"

You see, Maw was awfully old-fashioned.

III

THE snow had been falling for hours, and the whole sweep of the land lay dead under the endless winding sheet of nature. There was an utter stillness, as if Time had halted in his forward march and stood immovable, paralyzed, deprived of eyes and speech.

There came a harsh, groaning sound of wheels outside the door, and the doctor appeared. Miniature icicles glistened in his nostrils and on his beard. In Salt Lake he had ten wives and more than a hundred grandchildren.

The baby, little Western Redfern, lay still as a marble angel cut into an immortal Grecian urn. By the side of his crib stood his father and mother, tired and dazed. The mother kept her eyes glued on the child. Joe looked questioningly at the doctor, who leaned over the crib, shook his head, and pulled at his beard.

"He's gone," said the doctor.

"I didn't come out here to lose my baby!" said Maw harshly. "You fix him up, doc. My breed don't die!"

"He's gone," repeated the doctor, as if he had not heard.

"You're crazy!" said Maw. "Call yourself a doctor? Back East in Vermont we got real doctors. West! West!"

The child was perfectly still. Outside it was snowing again, and the still air was painted into a heavy, impenetrable sheet of whiteness.

"Western! Baby!" called his mother.

"It's all over," declared the doctor, and departed.

He was used to these situations. He had more than a hundred grandchildren in Salt Lake.

They heard the wheels of his buggy groaning in the snow. The horses neighed, and the sound of the wheels grew faint. Then silence fell—a silence as vast as the whole of this terrible, terrible country.

"West, my love! My baby!"

"Don't take on like that, Maw!"

"Do you think that our baby could be dead, Joe? Our son? Oh, no! That doctor is sure crazy. I don't believe it. Let's ride him into town and see another doctor. Ba-by!"

"Oh, can't you see he's dead? I'll bury him, Rosie."

"Call yourself a father?"

"Now, Rosie, don't—don't take on so. I'll bury him in the dandelion field. His grave will be all golden in the summer."

"Golden or not, what's the difference now? Are you sure he's dead? Listen to his heart."

Joe bent over the crib.

"I don't hear nothin'."

"I'll listen. I think I hear! No—still as stone. Where did you say we should bury him? Yes—we'll bury him in the dandelion field, and his grave will be all golden. Well, Paw! Well, I guess this is the end!"

"We'll leave this farm," said Joe. "We'll go into Montana. We'll have it

easier in Montana. I had a letter from Tom Jackson—you remember Tom, the mail carrier who used to be in Clarkston? He says Montana is good. We'll pack up in the spring."

"When in the spring?"

"Oh, March."

"He'll be under ground three months in March!"

"No use worryin'."

"That's very well for you to say. You didn't carry him around in your body. You didn't give your blood—oh, you men! Honest to God, you're unfeeling!"

"Please, Rosie, don't talk that way! Please!"

"It pleases me. Lots of good you are! Good for nothin'! They was right back home. You're good for nothin'!"

"Have it your own way, then."

"Listen, was that his heart? Ah, I guess not! Doctors, doctors—what do they know? Back in the East a doctor knows somethin'. He would 'a' pulled through there. You wanted to come out to this wilderness. Well, you're out here, ain't you? And what have we got? What about the gold in California? What about the golden streets of California?"

"Oh, stop nagging, will you? Stop it!"

The snow outside seemed to be weighing them down, crushing them down, down. Would it never stop? How pale the child looked! He was like a dream that had never come true. That was it—a dream. They were still back in Vermont, and they would wake up and it would be sunny, and midsummer. They would go to their homes and try not to dream again.

"Joe, I feel—kind o' faint. Really, I think I'm goin' to—"

She fell limply into his arms, and he carried her into the bedroom. After a few minutes she opened her eyes. Waves of thoughts rushed back on her and inundated her.

"You didn't hear him? Ah, well! My mother used to say that everything was for the best. Of course you got to be funny to believe that. I have a notion that everything is for the worst. Still, we're young an' strong, an' we can work. Sure, let's go to Montana! Why not? I'll have more children, you bet—boys and girls, and they'll live. They'll live next time!"

"If you'd sleep for a little while—"

"I'm sorry, Paw, about—you know. I didn't mean to nag you. Why, you're a

good man! I couldn't 'a' picked better. What I like about you, Joe, is that you never complain. Every time I write home to my mother I say, 'Joe is wonderful. You never hear him complain.' You're a good man. Sure I'll go to Montana. I'd go to hell if you wanted me to. It's too bad about West, ain't it? Well, it's all in a lifetime, I guess. That's the dog scratching at the door. You'd better feed him. I'll rest a while. There's a lot of work to be done; an' don't forget that the canvas on the wagon is ripped. Good night, my husband!"

IV

In the spring they left Utah. They hitched up the horses, provisioned themselves for a long journey, and started stoically for the Northwest. It was hard to leave the farm behind. They had become accustomed to its ways, its kindnesses, its stubborn hardships, its beauty. Western had been born there. When April came, his grave would be golden with dandelions.

They had seen how, in the vast plains, the cowboys twisted the heads of the steers and held them helpless while the branding iron was applied. A burning smell, a cloud of smoke, and the operation had been performed. The brand remained forever. Their lives were like that. They had lived for a moment in Utah. They were branded forever by that land; and now they were moving on.

They took turns driving. In the morning Maw slept inside the wagon, while Paw drove. At noon they stopped in the hot, pathless prairie, and Maw built a fire and prepared the food, while Paw watered and fed the horses. Then she took her turn in the seat while he rested.

On—on! He would join her and take her hand.

"Have you forgot, Maw, how we made up our minds that we'd go back to Vermont one o' these days?"

"Some day we'll go, all right."

"This is a hard life for you, Rosie!"

"It's all in a lifetime."

Once, on the way, they passed a dead man with an arrow through his heart, and they realized that they were facing a new peril; but some kind fortune saved them from that terror. Either the Indians had passed out of that part of the country, or else they considered these two lone travelers too unimportant for an attack.

The next night one of the horses was stampeded by a wolf. They found him dead, next morning, with flies buzzing above his carcass.

Unexpectedly, Joe had a touch of sunstroke, and Maw did all the driving and nursing. He lay in the wagon, delirious, and Maw did the best she could. Once, in a frenzy, he jumped clear of the wagon and ran out into the broiling desert. She followed him like a faithful hound. After a horrible game of hide and seek that lasted for an hour, she caught him and carried him back to the wagon. Her hair came loose and fell over her shoulders, and her arms burned feverishly with the weight they carried.

The next day they came in sight of an army encampment, where they stayed for two weeks, until Joe was able to resume the journey.

"So you're goin' to Montana?" the commanding officer asked them, on the last day of their visit.

"They say Montana is the coming country," replied Joe.

"You'll have a hard time of it at first," the officer warned them. "It's a dry country. Water is hard to get."

"We'll get it," said Maw.

Two lieutenants with broad-brimmed hats and high boots escorted them into the new Territory—fine, upstanding fellows, of the type later immortalized by Remington. Maw and Paw watched them disappear into the horizon, golden cavaliers of the sunset.

"We would never 'a' seen these sights in Vermont," said Paw, moving his arm in a circle around his head.

They were in a great valley walled in by hills, purple and blue and crimson. The sky, cool and blue directly above, blazed into fire toward the horizon, where the clouds, claret-colored, poured themselves in a long stream over the hills.

Toward nightfall, the heavens became confused with heavy, black masses of clouds, and the whole vast auditorium of the prairie grew dark and chill. There was a low rumbling behind the distant buttes, and arrows of lightning pierced the great heart of the plains. Then the rain descended, whirled into mad dervish dances by the howling wind.

Whipped and beaten by the elements, the camp wagon moved stubbornly forward, somehow miraculously refusing to give an inch to the combating storm. At length

they came upon a deserted cabin, a pathetic remembrance of some defeated pioneer; and Paw unhitched the horse and drove him within to shelter. All night the wind roared above their heads and the rain blew in through the broken windows, drenching man, woman, and beast.

Next morning Paw roughly repaired the damage that had been done to the wagon. They ate canned tomatoes and sardines, and drank their coffee out of rusty tin cups. After the storm the heat was stronger than before, as if the sun wanted revenge upon the clouds that had, for a time, impertinently darkened his brilliant face.

"His grave must be lovely now," said Maw. "I wonder if he can see it! He was the exact image o' you, Paw. D'you rec'lect how he would drop off to sleep, so rosy an' sweet like?"

"I remember the time," murmured Paw, "when he first took notice o' the dog. It was like discoverin' a new country with all kinds of beautiful puzzles in it."

"Wonder what the folks are doin' back in Vermont now!" she said. "My brother, he's prob'ly choppin' wood, an' my maw is churnin' butter. Ah, that cream—it's so rich an' sweet! I'm so sick o' canned stuff! Have you noticed, Paw, how many rusty cans there are around these parts?"

"The road to hell is paved with canned tomatoes an' sardines, Rosie," replied Paw bitterly.

"Still," smiled Maw, "where else could you see such glorious mountains an' such a sky? It's like as if God's been keepin' this country secret from the rest o' the folks, just to give me an' you a pleasant surprise."

He turned in the seat, unexpectedly, and kissed her.

V

FARMING was hard and mean in those days. The newer methods of irrigation were as yet unknown. There were prolonged droughts, when the creek beds were dry for months at a time. In their new home, not far from the small town of Kalispell, Maw and Paw found that beginning all over again required every ounce of their strength and self-control. The heat during the day was terrific. They worked together in the fields, and came back to the house on fire with the sun, streaming with sweat.

But Maw was entering into a new happiness. Bob was born, and then, two years

later, Nell. When the children were old enough, she sent them off to school. The land she and her husband battled for a living must supply their boy and girl with an education.

Joe had a little money in the bank at Kalispell, and he kept adding to the sum, in the hope that in a few more years he and Maw might have enough to return to Vermont, and to settle where life would be easier for the whole family. Paw said that he was tired of being a trail blazer.

"We're the ones that do all the sufferin', Rosie, an' then the others come in after us an' grow fat on what we've built up. It's taken me years to develop this irrigation system—though it ain't right yet—an' now our neighbors come in an' profit because of our hard work. Them kids o' ours, they won't appreciate nothin' that we do for 'em. Nell is stuck on city life, an' wants to wear nice clothes; an' Bob, he don't like to help around the farm. I've seen him runnin' errands for the hardware dealer in Kalispell; an' when he ain't doin' that he's readin' them fool books o' his."

"Books is good," said Maw. "We'll give our children what we couldn't get for ourselves."

They had decided to leave Montana in April of that year. They had already received an offer for their place, enough to buy the farm in New England on which they had set their hearts; but in February Paw was unexpectedly taken down with pneumonia, and the money had to be drawn out of the bank for medicine and doctors.

It all happened with stunning swiftness. Within a week, Joe Redfern of the wide gray eyes and the boyish humor, the fellow who had caused many a feminine heart to flutter, lay dead in the Montana wilderness. He had adventured into the heart of mystery and darkness, had begun to build a new empire, and now, abruptly, his work was broken off. Maw had to take up the burden where he had left it. Plans for selling the farm and going to New England had to be abandoned through lack of funds. There was nothing to do but to begin all over again, with a strong heart and as short a memory as it is possible to have.

Her hands were rough and brown, with bony knuckles and blackened, uneven finger nails. You associated them at once with soil and hard work—sowing and plowing, cooking coarse food over kitchen fires, driving horses and cattle across the plains.

She was tall and spare of figure, angular and hard, like one of those outcroppings of granite in the Rocky Mountains. Her hunched shoulders proclaimed long hours of bending over wash tubs. Her feet were large, and she went about in heavy hob-nailed boots, mending fences and painting barns. She did not know what it was to have a vacation. She had worked hard all her life, and she intended to work until her children were educated. Then, and not until then, might there be surcease from the continual toil.

The small farm needed constant watching over. She was in the habit of taking part of the vegetables into town and selling them at the market. She did all this, in spite of the fact that her children were large and strong for their age. Nell was in high school, and bemoaned the fact that she had to go to town clad in the poorest homespuns. When Bob proposed that he should leave school and become an assistant to the hardware dealer in Kalispell, Maw had another battle on her hands; but she was stronger than her son.

"Is this the reason that I've put up with all these hardships, that you should leave school?" she put to him bluntly.

"I only thought that you was workin' too hard," replied the boy in a sullen voice.

"You 'tend to your business, which is learnin', an' I'll 'tend to mine!"

"I'm ashamed," said Bob, almost in tears. "Everybody at school makes fun o' me. They say I'm good fer nothin'."

The ghost of a smile flickered across Maw's weather-beaten face.

"Seems to me they said the same thing about your father!"

"I could make twenty dollars a week," said Bob, by way of tempting her. "I could support myself an' live in town."

It seemed to Maw, at that moment, that she was always losing the things she had loved most and struggled for hardest; but experience had steeled her will. She would fight hard now.

"You mean you want to leave the farm—for good?" she asked her son, and she could not help the trembling in her voice.

"One less mouth to feed," he said grimly.

"I don't want none o' your lip, Bob Redfern! I told you your business—it's studyin'. You're goin' to finish high school an' go to college, if it drives me to the poorhouse!"

The boy burst into tears, no longer able to sham manliness. His mother reached for him and took him into her arms, as if he were a baby. She remembered back to nights when she had held others in her arms, mothering. That man, her husband, and that child, her son, both were under the ground; but she would lose no more! She would fight and triumph or be swept away, ashes in the wind!

VI

THE crop that year was a dismal failure. What with the drought and the breakdown of the irrigation system, it was the worst that had come to Montana in Maw's recollection. She was, however, determined to support herself and her children on her vegetable money. To that end, she labored early and late in the garden. At five in the morning, when all the world was still a cold blue and the sky was the color of steel, she was up and about, cooking breakfast, feeding the chickens, digging up potatoes. At eight she had the rig hitched up for Nell and Bob, so that they might drive to school.

Tall, gaunt, hard as nails, there was something superhuman about her, as if she had sprung, phenomenally, from some miraculous rocky soil. Wind and heat failed to stop her incessant activity. Indoors or out, she was like a machine that does not know its limit, constantly functioning, even after darkness had rolled down from the hills, invading the valley in a vast wave of purple.

Maw was repairing the chicken house when Nell drove home alone, one evening in the early fall. The girl was greatly excited, and she gripped her mother tensely by the arm.

"Maw, guess what! Bob hasn't been to school for the last three days. He's working in the hardware store."

Maw said nothing for a few minutes. She looked before her to the horizon, where a hawk was circling over the purple buttes. It appeared as if she might turn into stone, so still was she, so much a part of the harsh, vindictive landscape which she had fought so hard for the sustaining fruits of existence. Then she turned swiftly toward the house.

A moment later Nell saw her on horseback, moving down the road toward Kalispell. She sat in the saddle, erect, defiant, an older and sterner Joan of Arc battling to

win the West from the dark ages, striving to save her children from futility.

She reined in before the hardware store and dismounted very deliberately, tying her horse to a near-by hitching post. Then she entered the store, shading her eyes, which had been dazzled by the sunlight. Presently she made out her son in the rear, waiting on a customer. He looked up and hesitated for a moment in his work, but she motioned him to go on.

Meanwhile the proprietor of the store came up to her and smiled, as if to engage her in conversation; but the grim expression on Maw's face discountenanced him. He wiped his hands awkwardly on his apron, and moved away. Bob finished with the customer and advanced to the front of the store.

"I'd like to have a talk with you, Bob," she said.

They left the store, and he followed her to the edge of the town. They walked out to some near-by fields. It was hot, and the sun was a huge branding iron in the sky. She led her son behind a tall rock that sprang up from the earth and towered above them.

"I want you to hit me," said Maw to her son. "I want you to hit me as hard as you can."

He looked at her with amazement in his large gray eyes, and stepped back into the shadow of the rock.

"Why, Maw, what's the matter? What's got into you, Maw?"

"Ain't you fightin' me?" Maw asked. "Ain't you fightin' me hard? You're fightin' all that I live for, all that I've worked for since I left Vermont; an' you're not fightin' in the open, Bob. Come out fair an' square. Hit me as hard as you can!"

"I don't know what you're talkin' about," muttered the boy. "Did you know I was makin' twenty dollars a week?"

Her answer was to strike him a sharp blow across the mouth. His lip began to bleed, and his face looked startlingly white in contrast; but he kept his eyes glued on her proudly, and waited.

"Ain't you goin' to fight me in the open?" she asked.

"You hit me!" he whispered. "You never hit me like that before! What have I ever done that's so wrong?"

"You're an enemy behind my back—like the drought, like soil that won't grow anything, like the burning sun."

"No, Maw—I ain't no enemy of yours."

"You mean that you're workin' with me, son?"

"Yes, Maw."

"Then you're goin' to quit your job in the store, an' you're goin' back to school; an' after that you're goin' to college."

"Yes, Maw."

"I'm right sorry I hit you, Bob; but it did us both a lot of good, I think."

She turned away, and had walked perhaps ten feet when he came running up to her, his eyes aflame with emotion. He swept her into his arms and kissed her again and again.

They stood thus, close together, for perhaps five minutes, while the shadows of the buttes grew longer and longer, enfolding them, drawing them closer to the mighty heart of the land. After a time she held him off by the shoulders.

"Go back to the store an' finish your work, Bob," she told him. "You can start back to school on Monday."

When he had gone, she returned to get her horse, mounted to the saddle, and rode off down the rutted, dusty road. She had gone perhaps two miles when she reined in sharply by the side of a clump of bushes. Beyond, in the meadow, was a mound of earth, over which stood a wooden cross of pine wood. She looked at her husband's grave for a long time, leaning weakly against a tree that rustled above her in the slight breeze. It was cool here, and there was a fragrance of wild flowers in the air.

She began to cry. The tears rained down her face and dripped to her heavy shoes.

Day after day, for more years than she could remember, she had been a truck horse, pulling her almost unbearably heavy load without a murmur or a word; but now, curiously, in the breath of a moment, a softness clothed her like a benediction. There was a wistfulness reminiscent of her vanished girlhood in the way she stood, in the way she wept. It was as if the years had turned themselves back, and she was young again, and beautiful, too. In that one entranced moment she was Rosaline Jenkins of Clarkston, Vermont, willing to marry handsome Joe Redfern, willing to follow him to the unexplored parts of the world.

She stooped to pick some of the wild flowers growing around her feet. Their perfume pierced the air with a penetrating

sweetness. After she had collected a bunch of them, she placed it over the grave.

She emerged into the road again, and she was once more gaunt and hard as nails. She was separated by years of toil from the softness of girlhood.

It was dark when she arrived at the farm.

VII

THE years whitened her hair and lent her an expression of fine dignity. Her face was dark and swarthy, burned by countless days of merciless sun. In her eyes there was a far-off look, as if she were surveying the measureless reach of prairie to the base of the Rockies and beyond—beyond. You saw her against the sky, tall, heroic. She belonged to the rocks, the rivers, the leaping cañons, the soaring hills. She stepped into the house, and the walls melted before her, and the moon and stars were revealed to frame her figure. Under the sky she was enhanced and beautified beyond measure. Behind the plow she appeared an immortal being, a symbol of progress.

The West-bound train swept into the Kalispell station, the locomotive headlight burning a white-hot tunnel of light through the blackness. The station was deserted, except for the old passenger agent, who emerged from within with an oil lamp. He held the lamp in front of Maw's face.

"What? Back already?"

"I always wanted to see my old home in Vermont," said Maw; "but when I got there, I found that all the folks I'd known as a girl were gone. It's too far away, back there. This"—she made a sweeping movement with her hands, including the mountains, the plains, and the sky—"this

is my home. You see down there beyond those clouds? That must be Utah. My son Western is buried there, and the dandelions make a golden blanket over his grave. Over there by that rocky hill my husband an' me first came to Montana. We was young then, an' nothing could stop our dreams. Now Joe is gone. Did you know him? They called him good for nothin' back East, but I was willin' to follow him around the world on stilts. You know, my son Bob 'll be surprised to see me back so soon. He's a bright lawyer, everybody says. He fights his cases hard, like me an' Joe fought the sun and the soil. His sister Nell is a mother now. Have you seen the baby? The image of my husband, they say; but do you hear me talkin'? Ah, the mountains have loosened my tongue! Home! Home!"

The station agent looked at the white-haired woman admiringly.

"What you are, Maw, is a pioneer. Ever read about 'em? You're one. They're dyin' out fast in these parts. If it wasn't for the likes o' you, there wouldn't be anything here but a wilderness."

"Others would 'a' come," she said simply; "just as others will come after I've gone."

"There'll never be another one like you, Maw!"

She turned away to the buggy waiting for her, clambered in, and drove away. The station agent held the lamp up high, as if to catch a last glimpse of her.

The next morning, before the sun had yet risen, she was a dark figure silhouetted against the sky, part of the land, part of the West that she had brought to life, painfully, after a hard struggle.

STEADFASTNESS

You were all the songs of birds to me,

You were all the stars of night—

My circle of felicity

And sum of all delight!

You were all that I could dream or know

Of everything divine;

No words that poets set in row

Could equal what was mine.

No song could overdo your praise,

Though Shakespeare had his will;

And what you were in other days

You are, dear, to me still!

Harry Kemp

Michael of the Point

HOW THE LITTLE PEOPLE CAME TO THE OLD GRAY TOWER
OF DEIRDRE AND HER CHILDREN

By Turbesé Lummis Fiske

THE old stone tower cast a long, thin shadow on her as she came slowly up to the point that overlooked the wide Pacific. The old stone tower—their last refuge from the world!

Avon raised her pale young face, with the eyes that seemed always asking, toward the topmost room. She could see her father's emaciated outlines bent ceaselessly over his writing. How was it with him now? Was the great word coming to him, as he dreamed—the word for which he had been waiting seven years, and which he thought to find at last, here upon the wind-swept point, so near the stars?

Eighteen years before—it was in 1895—Michael Shane was one of the foremost newspaper correspondents in the country. With an acute mind and a penetrating vision, he had journeyed the length and breadth of Europe and Asia, seeing, learning, setting down in trenchant phrase the political, social, and intellectual status of the far-flung countries of the earth. In the spring of that year he went to Ireland, and it was there he met Deirdre Boylan.

Deirdre Boylan was a child of the country of Lough Gur, that famous lake where lies the door of the Tir-na-nog, the fairyland of youth, and where in ancient times the sacred Celtic rites were held. All those of the Boylan blood were favored of the fairy folk. Boylans had seen the race of the elfin shallops, the enchanted castle of the Earl of Desmond, and the little herd boy who stole the golden comb. Deirdre herself, with an unquestioning conviction in the existence of the Little People, had spent her childhood wandering Knock Adoon looking for fairy rings and the treasures of the leprechauns.

When she saw Michael, it was as if all the folk beliefs of her race were incarnated

in him. With his fine, tall figure and his face of a seer, to Deirdre Cuchulainn he was the hero god. The only regret she felt in giving her future into his gentle hands was that out in the rush and battle of the world he had forgotten the fairy traditions that were his heritage, and was inclined to indulgent laughter when she set the Little People's milk outside the door.

Deirdre was sixteen when Avon was born. She welcomed the baby with adoration, worshiping Michael the more that through his love had come so beautiful a child. She and Avon played like children together, and told each other of their mystic fancies, big-eyed because on the vine outside their window an elfin thing was riding, hidden behind the curl of a leaf; or breathless because old Timmy, the cat, had had the tip of his tail pulled by Fer Fi, the dwarf.

The luck of the Boylans followed them. Prospering at home as he had afield, Michael showered his loved ones with comfort. They never knew what it was to want for anything. They wore soft things next to the skin. Deirdre had a maid, and never touched her hands to the grime of the kitchen or the black of the stove.

When Avon was eight, the Russo-Japanese war broke out, and Michael Shane went to the front as a war correspondent. His work was brilliant, and his dispatches were quoted everywhere. Deirdre sang his name and flung kisses to his shadow in distant lands. He was in a fair way to become famous.

But Michael Shane came home a different man. He had gone in the flush of his prime, a vigorous man of forty-five, witty and forceful, quick and flashing-eyed. He came back with the expression of a man who had seen strange things. His eyes

and the lines of his face seemed to have sunk in.

The change did not frighten Deirdre. To her he looked more than ever like Cúchulainn, the island hero, returned. All the mysticism of her people leaped up in comprehension of his announcement that out in the wastes of Mongolia there had come to him a messenger from the stars. It seemed like a return to his Irish heritage.

Even at the news that he had severed all connection with his newspaper, and with the occupations of the world, she made no demur. Was he not her god—even more so now, since he had been set apart by the elder brothers of the stars that he might do their work, and might transmit to men the great teaching for which they had been waiting since the dawn of earth.

To the last drop of blood she was with him; and it was even this that he asked.

"Deirdre, my darling," he said, "this little home of ours, this wee place we love, I must ask you to give it up. We shall be homeless wanderers. When the money we have is gone, we shall have only what is sent to us from the stars."

Deirdre looked all around the little house—the house where Avon was born—and then she lifted her face to Michael Shane.

"It shall be as you say, beloved!"

II

AND so they left the house where they had lived and loved, and Michael put their lives into the hands of his elder brothers of the stars. It was difficult to understand the messages that came to him, at first; but this, he said, was because they were only the beginning, a preparation for the revelations to come. With all the intensity of their faith in the Little Folk, Deirdre and Avon believed in this revelation; and it was the highest privilege of Avon's childhood to touch the precious pages on which her godlike father had transcribed the wisdom of the stars.

At first, with this worship to buoy them, their uncertain existence had not been hard. In the beginning, they still had their belongings, and there were always warmth and food. Then, little by little, the things slipped away, the places that they lived in grew less fine. Into this world Deirdre's second child was born.

It was in one room above an alley from which rose the smell of things Chinese, and where by night the slipping shadows went

and came. The room was grimy with a thousand miseries of former occupants, but Deirdre smiled in the teeth of them, even the night that Keir was born. She walked the floor and sang little bits of song; and though her hands would ring while she was singing, she would not let Michael rise from his corner, where behind a screen he was covering reams of paper with a feverish pen.

"Not yet, my dearest!" she would call out dauntlessly. "Go back to your work! Not yet!"

Catching sight of Avon's little anxious face, she laid it lovingly to her breast and whispered:

"Don't be afraid, my littlest! The Little People are walking with us to-night. I am crying a little, but not from being afraid."

When Keir, the tiny bud that the Little People brought to them, was only four weeks old, they had to move on; and thenceforth their nomadry had been without end. When bills could not be paid in one place, they moved on to new scenes, whence destitution would soon drive them on again.

People looked askance at them, and were surly at taking the children into their rooms—begrudging them even smelly lodgings without a glimpse of tree or sun. So Keir had learned very early to be still. He did not cry, and his babbling voice was low, as if he knew that people must not be disturbed. His only playhouse was between the table and the window, and there he and Avon played, murmuring in each other's ears about the Little People and the beauties of which they dreamed.

Michael sometimes had black moments.

"Deirdre," he would cry, "I wanted to shield you!"

"Your love is my shield, my Michael!"

At Deirdre's answer he would go on with his writing.

Now and again there would come people who would ask Michael of the stars, and when they left there would be a little pile of gold or silver on the table. Then Michael would take Deirdre in his arms and say that the world was beginning to understand, and for many days he would have great heart for his work.

But more often the visitors would listen silently, looking upon Michael with a strange expression in their eyes. They would shake their heads as they went away,

and Michael would cry out in the night, in a way that frightened Avon:

"They think that what I am doing is worth nothing! Deirdre, suppose they are right, after all! Suppose that what they think of me is true!" He would look at his manuscript, and ask her: "Deirdre, do you believe that I am wrong?" He would look into her soul. "Deirdre, do you believe that what they think of me is true?"

Avon, sitting up in the shadow, would echo the cry in her heart, not quite knowing all that it implied—knowing only that it meant something terrible, like that strange look in people's eyes; but Deirdre would never fail.

"Do they not always think that of the great?" she would say. "What illustrious one was ever understood? Go on with your work, my darling."

"But you, Deirdre, and the babies—men say that I am doing ill by you."

"What do their sayings matter, when we are satisfied?"

"And you are, my dearest? This great work I am doing makes up to you for poverty and neglect? It will not be long. Soon, Deirdre, soon the great message will come, and then we shall be hungry no more. Just a little while, Deirdre, I promise you. You believe in me, Deirdre—you believe?"

His brow would be dewed with sweat.

"I believe in you, my king! I shall always believe in you."

But the great message never came. Always it was just on the way, always Michael was just on the edge of receiving the word that would mean the extermination of poverty, the blotting out of all the evils of mankind. When it came there would be no more hunger, there would be no more cold, they would no longer go unshod. Wait only a little longer! It was coming to-morrow, or perhaps next week, or the month to come.

And so passed seven years.

The year that Avon was sixteen, they took their last move. Pushed to the very edge of the western world, they came to a little harbor that drowns on the verge of Balboa's ocean. Their only belongings were a few odds and ends, the clothes they wore on their backs, and Michael's manuscripts; but Michael was fired with purpose. It had been revealed to him that here, in this quiet port, was to come to him at last the message from the stars.

Out on the wind-swept point southwest of the town, overlooking the rocky islet where the lighthouse stood, he saw an old stone tower, a relic of days of Spanish occupation, abandoned for years. It had once been a lighthouse. Now the garden was gone, the windows were broken, the doors had fallen from their hinges, and there were no furnishings; but up at the top of the stairs of stone there was a room that looked over the world—a room that was close to the stars.

It had been the room of the old mariners' light. Its floors and its walls were of stone, its ceiling was beamed. It had eight windows—four that looked out on the sea, two on the harbor, and two that looked back northward to the crest of the hill.

The tower stood on land that belonged to a well-to-do banker of the town, the roof and the trees of whose home could be seen on the hill. Michael went to him, companioned by Avon, but Curtis Brent dismissed the dreamer's request on the ground that the old tower was not fit to live in.

"But you do not know," said Michael. "It is the command of the stars. I must work there, for there I am to find the key to the universe!"

Brent shot him a glance and laughed shortly, looking at Michael with the expression that Avon hated. Who was he to jeer at the gods? He shrugged.

"Far be it from me to interfere with the stars. Take the tower, and do what you please; but I wash my hands of it."

"You laugh," said Michael, rising to go; "but one day you shall laugh no more!"

That day they moved into the old gray tower.

Their furnishings were boxes, their bed a pallet of rags and straw, shut off by a curtain of sacks from the other half of the lower room, which was their kitchen and parlor. There was a gaping hole in one dusty window, and the wind blew in from the sea. They had no broom to sweep up the floor and the walls; they did what they could with budgets of paper. For the door they hung up two sacks, which did not shut out the cold.

There was a hearth, where they burned a few sticks of wood to warm their fingers, not to cook; for there was nothing to cook. There was not even flour left in the larder. They hugged the flame, but could not be warm. They drank water, for it was all

they had; but Deirdre laughed, and crooned soft songs, and told them tales of Geroid and the world under Lough Gur, that they might forget the pangs of their bodies.

And what was it to wait? It would be only a little while now; for when Michael went up to his tower, this was what he had said:

"Deirdre, my own, it is the hour! When I come back, it will be with the word!"

III

THE sun was beginning to arch its course toward the west, and still the man's sunken face bent over his work in the tower. Avon was empty, very empty, and the whole world seemed cold. She had no shoes, and the wind blew on her shivering legs and through the ragged tatters of her frock. She did not look like a girl, she did not look like a woman; she looked like a thing that had come from the stars.

She raised her eyes once again to the tower, and then she pushed open the curtain and went into the kitchen.

Some driftwood that she and Keir had gathered was burning on the hearth; yet the room was very chill. Deirdre was sitting by the fire in a dream. Keir was drawing strange things with a stick upon the flagged stone floor. His eyes were preternaturally large, and were lit with a look of far-away. The hand with which he limned had tints of blue; but he said nothing. He knew that up in the tower Michael was at work with the stars.

They smiled at each other, pretending that it did not matter, pretending that there was no hunger or cold; but they sat close, for the warmth of their bodies. Deirdre wove tales for them again. Her voice did not falter in its gayety as she told them of Greenfoot and the magic purse. She held them close, crooning.

"Biggest and Littlest, soon are coming our hearts' desires! We must be strong as Dermot and as brave as Cuchulainn, for it will be but a little time!"

There was a footstep on the floor above them. Deirdre halted. Michael was coming down the stairs.

Avon and Keir clung to each other's hand. Michael stood in the doorway, the pencil still in his grasp. Deirdre looked swiftly up at him, but when she saw his face she did not question—she only opened her arms.

"My heart!" she said to him, as one who mothers, and worships, and believes.

He held Deirdre tight, and shook his head.

"To-morrow!" he said. "To-morrow, Deirdre, the great message will come!"

He looked at her like a man who promises, and then, pitifully, like a man who defends.

Deirdre lifted her smile to him.

"Of course, Michael, to-morrow! We must not expect it too soon."

But Avon could see her mother's face, and it made her afraid.

Michael closed his eyes. He looked very worn and tired. Deirdre hovered over him with soft little pats on his face and his forehead, yearning caresses. He must rest, he must have food. He must go to his room, and she would come in a whiff with his supper.

Avon and Keir looked at each other when he had gone. They saw Deirdre set out on the table one cup, a cracked pot with a morsel of tea that had been used over and over for two days, and one little crust of bread.

Then Avon knew why she had been afraid. She looked at Keir, and he put his arms around her and held her close. The bread and the tea were father's. The others would not eat to-night.

But there was something that must be done. They turned, as if asking a boon.

"We are not hungry, Deirdre. May we eat of the Little People's sup to-night?"

Deirdre averted her face.

"Oh, my littlest!" she said; but then she turned and was once again Deirdre the gay.

And so they partook of the Little People's sup—a cup of water, three kisses, and the nectar from a honeysuckle flower that grew over the door.

They sat in the dark, saving what ends of candle they had for father; and so, as Deirdre held them to her breast and told them of the Little People, they could not see her tears. The tower became an enchanted tower emblazoned with gold, and the floor where they lay was softened by pillows made from the down that was plucked from the breast of a swan, and there came to them spinning fairies who fashioned them garments of fleece that were as warm as the sun.

But when Deirdre finished, the tower was only the tower, and they remembered hun-

ger and cold and pain. Inside of them were empty spaces like terrible, black, cold rooms; but they would not tell Deirdre. She should think they had forgotten.

They took each other's hand and wandered out together in the dusk. Perhaps here in the silence they might truly see the Little People. Perhaps, even, the tiny ones might leave them something to eat!

They turned over the shells and the little stones, looking for something, even a seaweed, that might be eaten.

A stranger came up to them from the little dock where he had moored his motor boat. He was a tall young man, and smiling, and he wore a long, warm coat. Swift to see the thin little dress that fluttered against Avon's trembling limbs, he took off the coat and held it out; but she drew back. She was not cold, she said.

He noted the hollows at her neck, her wistful elfin chin, her hands, too slender at the wrist, and the lashes that drooped against the tender outlines of her cheek. He had in his pocket the remainder of a lunch that he had taken with him—cake and bread, and fruit, and breast of chicken—things to make the mouth water, viands such as one dreams; but no one in the world should dream that the children of Michael Shane went unfed.

"We are not hungry, I thank you," Avon said with quaint precision. Keir turned with her from the proffered feast. "We have just dined."

They went hand in hand toward the tower.

"Just think of it, Avon!" said Keir. "He had—chicken!"

IV

THERE was no hiding the barren table any longer from Michael. He put his hand on Avon's shoulder, and looked at her in the morning light.

"Comfort, what did you eat last night?"

Avon hesitated. What would Deirdre have her say—the truth, or something that would ease him? Michael groaned.

"Oh, God! Brothers of the stars, what lack in me that ye delay?"

But Avon comforted him, as in all these years she had seen Deirdre do. They were not afraid; they knew that it was coming.

"It is, Avon—yes, it is! You believe me, child? Why, last night they told me why it was delayed. There is more to the message—much more. But it's coming to-

night—to-night, Avon. Can you wait just one more day?"

"As long as you ask it, father."

He could see in her eyes her fierce believing. Her mind could not falter; it was only her body that was weak.

When Avon and Keir next went out to gather wood, they saw a white launch anchored down by the pier. On its prow was the name "Viking," and in it was the strange young man. He told them that his name was Stephen, and held them there long with his talk. He wanted to return with them, but Avon would not let him accompany them home. He should not see that the wind whistled in through holes in their window, nor the things that Deirdre wore. She did not see him watch them go back to the tower.

For supper there was nothing but the bread of the fairies. Avon could hear the stirring of Michael overhead as he labored at the bidding of the stars. When would he announce the magic charm that was to assuage their suffering? Suppose the hours kept slipping into days, and the days into weeks, and—suppose it did not come? What if the elder brothers should fail?

She caught at Keir. He was the only one with whom she did not pretend.

"It will come—it will, won't it, Keir? It's just the stars that are slow? It isn't"—she remembered Michael's cry in the night—"it isn't because father is—*wrong*?"

"Doesn't Deirdre say he never is wrong? Avon, we *must* believe!" But his little lip trembled. "It's only this waiting. If we didn't feel so empty! If only the Little People would come! Avon, do you think, if we *prayed* to them—"

So they prayed to the Little People—prayed for food. Surely they must come, for had not Deirdre told them so? But what if they, too, were so far away, like the elder brothers? Might they forget their children?

The earliest thing next morning there was lying on their doorstep a little red basket, full of food. Avon's heart sang all day long. Had not the Little People spoken? Was not this their way of acknowledging Michael, and paying him homage? Ah, it was only to the great they did that!

It was this that made the shining of her cheeks as Stephen saw them that afternoon, at the landing; but he also saw other things.

"I hate to think of you, child, in that cold, dark tower, and out in the wind without any wraps."

Avon started up with every fiber of her loyalty stirring in protest.

"It's not a cold, dark tower! And we don't dress like this because we're poor! My father is a great man, and we have everything in the world that we want!"

Why did Stephen stand there so silent, as if he did not believe? As Avon burst forth impetuously with the tale of what the Little People had done, he listened with a curious look in his eyes. Oh, to show him what manner of man her father was, how wise, how great! To have Stephen realize his sublimity!

At that moment she saw Michael coming toward them over the headland. His ragged coat flapped about him, his eyes burned deep in his harrowed face, above the tortured mouth and the nose that sprang forth so chiseled and aquiline. Avon saw every line, every hair that concentration and suffering had made white, every tag of his threadbare garb. Not thus would she have Stephen see him.

There were times when Michael was seized with a hunger for communion with his kind. He did not know who Stephen was, and it did not matter; he saw in him a listener, some one with whom he might talk. He looked across to the lighthouse which loomed such a little way beyond them, connected with the point by a narrow breakwater of rock. Michael never gave the salutation of common men.

"You are watching the light?" he asked. "It is a great light, yet not so great as my own." He turned to Stephen strangely. "Did you know that I walk with the elder brothers of the stars?"

Avon's eyes were tense on Stephen, but he did not laugh.

"I have heard of you from my father," he said. "My name is Stephen Brent."

Michael did not seem to hear the young man, for he was lost in his own thoughts; but Avon had heard. Brent! Stephen Brent! He lived back on the crest of the hill; he was the son of Curtis Brent.

Michael went on in a deep voice. He did not heed Avon's tugging at his sleeve. She would have bid him beware what he said before the son of Curtis Brent.

"People do not believe," he said; "but I can show you—I can show you the very writings I receive."

Avon watched Stephen breathlessly, to see how he would take it, and she felt the cold foretaste of dread come up in her heart; but Stephen gave no sign of noting the bare, cold rooms, the poor little rags that were theirs. When he took into his hands the manuscript that Michael gave him, there was no mirth in his eyes.

"You see?" said Michael. "You see what they are?"

He listened for Stephen's answer with an anxious brow, and Avon felt her heart beating with strokes of anguish. Father, father, what justice would be done you?

"I see," said Stephen, and he gave Michael his hand.

To Avon it was like a token of faith, a belief in the stars, a justification of the friendship between herself and Stephen. It could be no sin to see him if she could teach him the worship of her father, and show him the greatness of Michael Shane.

V

DAYS went on, and still the great message by which Michael would prove his mastery did not come. Avon saw a shadow come over his brow. He grew thinner and more silent, and into his gaze came the look of one who is lost. The girl's heart would have failed her, but that the Little People were steadfast. Night after night they came, bringing not only food, but money, and clothes to keep them warm.

The Little People—God keep them! If she could see them and speak to them, if she could pour out her gratitude!

She awoke one morning at dawn, and heard a sound that made her spring to her feet. The Little People at the door! She ran forth in the vague light of dawn. The basket, indeed, was lying there, but there were no Little People. What she saw was Stephen Brent.

Stephen Brent! When she had told him of fairies, how he must have laughed!

She caught up the basket and ran after him, her curls falling in dark trouble about her eyes, her cape loose at her throat—the cape that *he* had given her—not the Little People!

"Oh, Stephen, how could you? Do you think that we would take charity?"

"Avon, you know it is not that!" She twisted her fingers in bitter pain. "Avon, don't look so! You know that I would not have hurt you for anything in the world. I only wanted to help."

"Help! Who are you to help us, Stephen Brent? My father is a great man, and what help do we need?" The tears came up beyond her stopping. They had lived on the charity of a Brent! "Why did you do it? Why? Why?"

"Avon, how could I see you go hungry, and ragged, and cold—"

He had pitied them—the children of Michael Shane! Pitied the children of him who walked with the gods! How could he have done that?

Stephen looked at her doggedly.

"I don't call any man great who can't take care of his children."

"How dare you say that, Stephen, when you have seen his writings, and know about his messages from the stars?"

"His writings? Avon, you shouldn't delude yourself about them any longer. You know they're not worth the paper they're written on!"

There was a beating terror in her heart.

"Stephen! That is what you believe? Stephen, tell me you don't believe it!"

"Avon, I will tell you anything else in the world, but I can't tell you that."

Her broken dreams blew all about her. She flung the basket at his feet.

"Then I hate you, Stephen Brent, and I'm never going to see you again!"

She put her hands up to her face and ran down the road, with eyes that could not see for tears.

Ah, if she could wipe out the shame of Stephen's charity—charity from one who pitied and patronized her father! The very dress she wore was charity's. It felt defiling. She could bear to have nothing that was a Brent's. Oh, to tear it off and burn the dress to ashes!

She had already struck a match when there came to her the thought of Deirdre. Deirdre would ask what had become of the dress; and when she knew the truth, she would suffer as Avon was suffering. Must that be? Must Deirdre, too, go back to rags?

The match died down in Avon's hand. Deirdre must never know. She must still believe in the Little People; so Avon must still be beholden to Stephen's alms.

When the girl started back into the tower, she suddenly remembered the basket. There would be no more fairy baskets at the door—no more food!

She was in a fever lest she should wake the others when she crept back into bed,

lest they should see her face and know the pain that gnawed her heart. She lay there covering her face from view and wishing that time might put off the moment when Deirdre and Keir must rise and go to the door.

At last the time came. Avon heard them guessing what the Little People had brought that day, she heard Deirdre's feet dancing to the door—and the lost ring of the voice that said:

"But, littlest, it isn't here!"

And then there was the pain of the gay little tale that Deirdre made of a fairy wedding, and of a feast which had lasted so late that the little basket was neglected to-day, and the pretense that to-morrow it would be they who would do the feasting. Avon knew only too well that to-morrow it would not be feasting they did in the tower.

She pulled at her hands when Michael came down, for she saw age come into his face when he knew that there was no food. Neither was there the message. But why? But why? He looked across at his wife with terror in his eyes.

"Deirdre, have I failed?" he cried.

"Patience just a little longer, beloved! To-morrow!"

"To-morrow! Must everything be to-morrow?" He passed a chill hand across his brow. "My time grows so short, and there is so much to do! Oh, God, must my work go for naught?"

VI

THE black days fell upon them, and Michael cursed himself for the failure of their bread. Avon tried to make up to him for it with passionate devotion, for she knew that it was not he who had done it, but herself.

As day followed day, and still he did not receive the word, Avon's lips against his hand, her warm young cheek against his knee, could no longer comfort him. He walked the floor of his tower, crying out to the stars that they withheld the light from him—the light for which his loved ones, all the world, were starving.

"Shining ones, do not abandon me!"

He would look down at the lighthouse beyond the point, calling Avon to observe the light on which hung the safety of a few passing boats, how steadily it burned—while his light, on which hung the destiny of a world, would not even burn when fed

with his heart's blood! A terror of self-deception came over him. What if all those things he had dreamed were false? He looked at Avon's paling features. Of what avail were his labors, if his daughter must look so?

"Child, child, and I wanted to light you a star!"

He grew gaunter, more shadowlike. His shelves were piled with the writings dictated by the elder brothers, but there never came the great word he craved. Sometimes he did not hear when people spoke to him. His eyes were fixed on the distance, as if searching for the light he could not kindle.

No one came to the old stone tower—no one but McLeet, the lighthouse man, or his assistant, Durgan. The one was curt and squat and keen, and the other lean and not given to talk; but Avon was glad of their coming, for there was no mockery in their eyes when they looked at Michael.

But she felt utterly alone. Each day she saw Stephen passing down to the point, sweeping out to sea in the Viking, and he did not stop at the tower, nor did she give any sign that she saw.

There were days of stark hunger. Weeks passed when they had nothing to eat but a few little crabs that the children caught in the rocks, tea brewed of weeds, and sometimes a fish brought by the lighthouse men. Deirdre grew to look no more like Deirdre; her skin was like satin through which a candle shines. Days came when she forgot to tell of the fairies, when she lay very still.

"Just to rest for a while, my littlests," she murmured.

Avon spoke in an anguished whisper:

"Keir, if the Little People take her—"

His little mouth set. Soon after, he was gone. Hours later, he returned, panting under the weight of a fish. He had crossed the breakwater alone and borrowed tackle of McLeet. Deirdre sang and rocked him to her. She no longer looked so much like one who had relinquished her ties to the earth.

After that Keir went every day; but often the fishing was very poor, and they had nothing. There came a period when the fish did not bite at all, and he sat fruitlessly for days. It was then that he heard from McLeet of Wiegand, an old fisherman living down on the harbor side of the point, who fished on the low-lying rock islands just visible on the horizon, where wonderful catches were made.

As McLeet finished, he caught at his heart, and gritted his teeth with pain. For some moments he could not move, until Keir found in his pocket a bottle of green pills and gave him one. It was the last in the phial.

When McLeet had gone, Keir sat looking at the distant islands. He told no one but Avon what he was thinking. The others thought him so little!

In the whole week he had caught but three fish, and they were but small. Out on the islands there were many fish, and large ones. If he could catch many, he could sell them in town and buy some things that were needed for Deirdre and father.

"But, Keir, it is so far away," said Avon; "and the old man seems so feeble and old!"

"Hush—don't let Deirdre hear you! Haven't I got to do something, Avon, when the Little People have forgotten us?"

The morning broke fair; but against the horizon a few little clouds were drifting, like mallards' down. Keir told Deirdre that he was going down to the old fisherman's hut on the shore; and he kissed them good-by.

Avon saw the little sailboat go floating like a gull out past the point, through the treacherous quarter circle of the reefs. At length she could not see it, but only the islands, almost a shadow on the southern sky.

The sun shone clear, but the little clouds were drifting. For food there was a broth made from the bones of a fish caught two days before. Deirdre cuddled her cheek against the window, dreaming; but Avon, with uneasy eyes, watched the clouds scudding from the south like teeming galleons.

Michael had not slept for many days. He paced the tower restlessly.

"While I sleep, they might come, and I should miss the word."

The sight of Deirdre's face tortured him.

"Deirdre, you suffer?"

She smiled at him.

"Not I, beloved!"

"Sometimes it seems that I must die, and no one be the better for my living—no one! Oh, shining ones, what have I done?"

He took up his manuscripts, reading them over and over, trying to wring some shred of vindication from the things he had written. Were they not revelations? Were

they not the words of the gods? Or were they only delusion?

"Deirdre, answer me?"

Her yearning hands went up to his face, with the flame of a love that had not faltered since those long-past days on the Limerick hills.

"Oh, my man, you know that they were not delusion! You know that you walk with the gods!"

He thought that he saw untruth in her eyes. He thought that she was lying to hide from him the fact that she no longer believed.

"But God, God, how could it be otherwise? When my light has not even shone for my dearest in life, how are you to believe that it could shine for men?"

The wind began humming past the tower, and Avon looked out at the little white caps of froth on the sea. Would not Keir and old Wiegand take counsel by the rising wind and turn for shore? She could see no sign of them returning, and by noon she heard the hissing of the beginning rain. The islands were shut from sight.

"Why doesn't Keir come back?" asked Deirdre. "Biggest, you are sure he's all right?"

"He's probably listening to fishermen's stories, and you know how he loves them, Deirdre," said Avon, with a smile that was only on her lips, but she stared at the racing waves and the scurrying rain. "If he would only come!"

Her heart turned over at the sound of feet, but it was only Durgan, asking for strychnine. Avon thought of the old man alone in the lighthouse, and it seemed cruel that they had not even medicine for him. Durgan would have to go on to the Brents' house.

His face looked anxious as he started on. He would have to hasten, for already the sea was rough between the lighthouse and the point, and it would not be easy to return to McLeet.

Avon drew in her breath sharply as he spoke of the sea. If it was rough at the point, what would it be outside? Durgan shook his head.

"Lucky none of you are out in it," he said.

Avon's eyes widened with terror.

"Keir!" she whispered. "Keir went to the islands."

She caught at Durgan's arm. Why did he look so? Would not Keir be safe?

"The waves break clean over the islands," said Durgan, "when the sea is like this. God, lassie, I wish he was home!"

She stilled a cry that rose in her throat, pitching her voice low, so that Deirdre might not hear.

"Perhaps they've been caught by it! Perhaps it has swept them away!"

Durgan shook his head.

"No, no. Wiegand would leave before they'd be caught."

"Then why aren't they back? The storm has been raging for hours."

Durgan looked away, chewing at his lip. She saw him go on up the hill, and she stood in the rain, shaking, staring out at the sea. The wind blew up, roaring, and the billows that boomed on the point shook the very earth under her feet. She tried to quell the surging thoughts that beat upon her mind, tried to keep from running to Deirdre and Michael and crying out her fear.

Down from the hill two men were coming—Durgan and Stephen Brent.

"I've got to go on!" shouted Durgan. "It's going to be hell's job getting back to the light, but I've got to make it to Mac!"

Avon turned her eyes to Stephen Brent, speechlessly.

"I've brought you a glass," he said steadily, "so that we can look and see if we see them."

She put the binocular swiftly to her eyes and swept the gray spaces of the ocean. At first it was all wallowing sea and tumbling billows. Then she saw the white foam breaking on the islands, covering them with its seething, covering all of them—all but a little rock that stood up at one end; and clinging to that rock were Keir and the old man. The waters boiled about them, and each time that the waves thundered in they leaped a little higher toward the brown shred of rock.

"Keir!"

The name broke from Avon in anguish. Stephen Brent saw the whiteness of her face through the rain, and the eyes which she turned to him held something more than fear. She was thinking that if it had not been for Stephen, for her finding out about his gifts, Keir would never have gone.

Stephen buttoned his oilskin tight to his chin.

"You keep the glass, Avon, and watch them. I'm going out there after them—going out in the Viking."

How the storm bulged, calling up the hunting terrors in her heart! Before she could stop them, her hands went out like two white wraiths, to draw him back.

"But, *Stephen*—"

The rain beat into their faces, the wind blew little gusts of fury. He bent down toward her.

"Avon, I thought you hated me!"

Something rose and swelled and broke in her heart, and she could not answer. She remembered who he was. She remembered Michael. She put her hands up pitifully to her face, and the tears broke out like a river that hurdles a dam.

Stephen did not touch her. He straightened up, threw back his head, and strode on toward the point. Suddenly she called after him. Why had she let him go? It was madness. What gain would there be for both to be lost? And she had not even touched him—she had not even given him the warmth of her hand!

But it was too late. The Viking battled out past the lighthouse, fighting its way to sea, its red light at the stern dancing like a will-o'-the-wisp. Out on the rock the little figure still huddled, drenched by the spray that broke over it.

Durgan loomed up beside her, his sou'-wester torn from his head, his face dripping wet. He raised his voice above the storm's triumphant chanting.

"I can't get across to the light!" he shouted. "The sea's cut me off! Avon, you'll have to go up to the Brents' and tell them to send word into town. It's time to fill the light now, and Mac can't get to it. If I don't get across, the light 'll go out!"

"Oh, Durgan! How long will it last?"

"Last! Good God, it 'll be out in half an hour!"

VII

THE light—the light that kept ships from striking the reefs—going out! In Avon's blind terror she turned to her father—him who was of the gods. Taking one last look at Keir, who was still hanging to the rock, and at the Viking beating its way through the storm, she ran into the tower.

"Keir? Keir? My littlest?"

Deirdre caught up her cape, and for once in her life she did not look at Michael; but all the force of her being swept out to her littlest as she made for the door. It was not till Michael called out to her that she halted.

"Deirdre! You think I am to blame! It was I who sent him there! You were hungry, and I could do nothing, so the boy went; and now you hate me, Deirdre!"

Deirdre turned at the door, holding herself up and smiling by supreme will power.

"No, no! I love you, my Michael, as I have always done; but you must not stop me. I must be near to him—near—"

She ran out to the very last reach of the land, to be closer to Keir.

Michael put his head in his hands. In the last dim light of the day Avon saw the Viking making its grim fight to the wave-swept island. She saw the refugees beckoning. Stephen battled to reach them, failing over and over again.

Stephen flung a rope. It missed them. He threw it again. Wiegand caught it and fastened it to them. They leaped, they were lost in the waves—but no! Stephen had dragged them aboard. The boat wheeled. It was the last that Avon could see. The night fell.

"Father! The light!" she screamed.

He came to the window with a dragging step, looking like a man grown suddenly old. The light was tossing up twisted yellow flickers, like a thing that fights for breath. It was going out!

Keir! *Stephen*! The light gave one last flare, and died. The lighthouse was as black as night.

Michael, with his great gaunt face like a stricken hawk, looked down at Avon. He saw her looking up with eyes that implored him, that silently cried out to the god of her belief:

"Oh, Thou who art great and infinitely wise—"

"Stephen!" he echoed, and there were musing and sadness in his tone. "And so it is not only of Keir you are thinking!"

The shamed tears flowed from under her lids, but Michael put his hand on her hair.

"Child, it is all right."

"But, father, I didn't want to think of him! I wanted to think of you forever! And he is—his father is Curtis Brent!"

She was almost afraid to look into Michael's face, but he nodded with piteous comprehension.

"So, so! The man who laughed at my stars! It does not matter, Avon."

He understood! Oh, wonderful, oh, heaven-sent father! Her heart sang a psalm of worship to him as she ran up the hill on Durgan's errand.

Michael's eyes followed her for a long time. His little Avon! Woman child of his seed and his blood! And what had he done for her? What had he done for any one? What had his life meant to any one in all these seven years? He beat his palm against his forehead.

The lighthouse was utterly dark. In his tower there burned but one little candle. From out there where the Viking rode, storm-tossed, the shore must be one black, hopeless blur; and the reefs were waiting.

He heard Avon's voice calling up to him from below:

"Oh, God, don't let them strike on the reefs!"

She ran down to the point, following with her eyes the dancing red light of the Viking. Michael was left alone in his tower—alone with his manuscripts, in the room where he had talked with the stars.

By the shuttling red light of the Viking he saw that the boat was nearing the breakers; and there was no light to warn it away. A light! It was what he had tried to kindle for his brothers—for Avon, who had called out to him with entreating hands—for Deirdre, waiting yonder in the storm for Keir. Why could he be no help to them? He who had set out to be a god, why was there nothing that he could do for man?

A light! He lifted his eyes to the wooden ceiling, the walls and the floor of stone. He caught up the chair and splintered it across his knee. He shattered the table, stripped the kitchen of its little sticks of furniture, piled them against the wall, and touched a match to them.

There was not enough. The flames would not reach to the ceiling; and this handful of fragments would not give enough light, unless the roof was set on fire. There was nothing left to burn in the room.

Nothing? The manuscripts—the writings of years—that which he had penned with his heart's blood! Michael took up

a great sheaf of them, and flung them upon the flames.

The fire flared up to the ceiling. The rafters crackled and spat. The light streamed out through the night. Down on the pier they could see its gleaming. They could see the tossing light of the Viking take course by it and ride past the reefs.

"Father!" Avon cried out. "Deirdre, father has made us a light!"

The heat was consuming him, but the light must still be fed. Just one more armful—and then for Deirdre and the comfort of her arms! Only she would understand what Michael had done.

He threw on the last of the manuscript. The flames shot up with a terrible blaze that blinded him. He threw up his hands in front of his eyes, and all at once he felt himself in the darkness.

He stretched out his arms for the doorway, calling on Deirdre, his beloved. He staggered forward, and felt the cool of the wind on his brow. The door—Deirdre! He stumbled, and fell the length of the stair.

Curtis Brent swung little Keir up from the battered Viking into the arms of Deirdre. His own arms went about Stephen's shoulders.

"Boy, that was a great piece of work!"

But Stephen looked at Avon.

"It was Michael Shane's light that did it," he said. "I could never have made it without that."

Brent led them up by the shore trail to the shelter and warmth of his house, and thus they did not pass the tower or learn the truth about Michael. It was Brent and Stephen, gone back later to fetch him, who found him lying at the foot of the stair, with one last scrap of his manuscript in the clasp of his stiffened hand. It was too late for their homage to reach Michael Shane, but it was no matter. He had spoken to men at last, and had given his word from the stars.

THE SUMMONS

WHY should we dread to breathe our final breath,
And shrink in horror from the touch of death?
At best he leads us to a land of light,
Beyond the boundaries of darkest night;
At worst he lulls us into silence deep—
The restfulness of an eternal sleep.

Hamilton Williams

Our Enemy, Jules Jerrard

A CHAPTER FROM THE EXPERIENCES OF THE VILLAGE NOTARY OF RAZAC

By Karl Detzer

THERE were four of us at table—three honest folk and Jules Jerrard. Strange company we made, looking up from our pickled veal's tongue with fear in our eyes, and each pretending not to understand—that is, all except M. Jerrard.

The newspapers were to blame, as they are for so many inconveniences. They brought the news to our quiet town of Razac. At first we thought it none of our affair, like the columns marked "Nice" and "Deauville," and had no time to read it; but the story persisted.

It seems that a certain M. Jerrard, a one-time apothecary who had made the war his profit with some new powder or other, carried away to the island of Raishe, on the north coast, money bags that jingled like a carnival pony, and bought himself a farm. Out of vanity he called the place a castle, and locked himself into it.

Now that was not considered peculiar at the time. The fellow was a fool with a head for chemical formulas—why worry about him? Ah, why?

Raishe is situated in the Manche, which the pig-headed British call the English Channel, though its old name is good enough for us. It is a steep, rocky island, with a poor harbor, and three kilometers of uneasy water between it and the mainland shore. The farm spreads over it, four or five unproductive hectares of stony land, a place for sheep, with gulls mewing about the cliffs all the gray day.

M. Jerrard and his servant—Lombard was the rascal's name—stayed out there entirely alone, except on Sunday, when they rowed ashore to kneel in the village church. He was a tall man, this Jerrard, with a smirk that set his nose atwist, and his head seemed inflated with new money; but his coat fitted his fine airs no better than crow feathers. It was black, yet

lacked the propriety of sable. It was made of some rich stuff, yet was shabby in spite of its cost. He wore it buttoned at the neck and thrown open across his shoulders, like a cavalry officer, yet the hang of it was wrong.

Enough—he gave the poor fishermen of the village plenty of oil for their tongues.

That was—let me see—early in 1919, five years ago. I had been to England on affairs which—well, affairs which interested the marquis in his castle on the hill, and which were no business of the world at large. Nor were they my business, either, except that he confided in me as the town notary.

It was Saturday night when I completed this task, and I faced a week-end in that infernal port of Southampton. You know it? Prim, proper, too chill and elegant for a decent provincial town.

I went to the docks. A small steamer, which had once been black but was now peeling its paint with age, lay at an untidy wharf. She was bound for Havre.

The captain was a Frenchman. I am a Frenchman; so when we started out across the Manche that night, we sat late in his little chart room, drank vile English spirits, and talked. It was late winter, after the war—a foggy time, if you remember, when for three months the mist hung tight as a glove upon the coast.

Toward morning, an hour after I had cramped myself in the single berth in the single stateroom, the steamer gave a sudden lurch. There was great confusion on the deck, and the lights went out. I am a careful man, and before getting into my boots I stuffed my papers—or, rather, the papers of the marquis—into my blouse.

What had happened I know not. Enough, we sank, stern first, in less than ten minutes.

The door to my stateroom had been jammed tight by the wreck. I went out through a porthole, gripped the rail above, and found myself alone on a deck that was slipping under water. There was a flat crate of something—bed springs, I discovered later—close by my feet.

I heard voices far off. The water was biting my ankles, so fast had it risen. I dropped the crate, which was twice my own size, into the sea, and slid across it. I am an inland man, and make no boast of my swimming, but I managed to stay afloat.

When dawn came finally, after I had held tight to the crating and prayed for what seemed half a lifetime, I was washed ashore on a sandy spit. In another quarter hour I knocked on the gates of a run-down farm atop the hill. A big, red-cheeked serving man, with eyes like a Normandy cow, opened the panel and looked at me.

I did not need to tell him of the wreck. Even a duller fool would have recognized what I was in my dripping clothes. Enough, I was in the great hall in new breeches—a size too large, but even a fine figure must appear ridiculous after a shipwreck—a fire was coaxing back my frozen blood, and a breakfast of omelet and toast, both exquisitely browned, stood on the table.

The master came—this same Jules Jerrard. He inquired after my state of health, and was insistent in his questions concerning the ship. I need not pretend that he looked a great fellow that morning. He merely was a man—a man who owned a fire and dry breeches, while I stood in need of both. He breakfasted me handsomely. After we were up from the table, he set a greatcoat upon my shoulders with his own hands, and told me that I looked well in it. He was rowing to town, to church, in five minutes. I might go with him in his boat, he said, and there in the village a tramway would take me to Havre.

I was grateful—a shipwrecked man either is grateful to the host who offers him warmth and dry clothes, or else he is a dog. At the church door I gave him my hand, promised to return the coat and breeches, and hurried to the station of the tramway.

II

HERE in our home village of Razac I had a great story to tell, and the next night at dinner I told it. I am a bachelor, you see, and live at the Boule d'Or—rather a poor

hotel when you compare it with the cities, but a comfortable place for a man of quiet tastes. There are three or us who have dined there off and on these five years—*monsieur le curé*, our village priest; I, the notary, with the seal of the republic in my pocket; and, when his wife will let him, old Papa Deguare, *brigadier* of the town *gendarmerie*.

When strangers came to the table, which they did infrequently—the wine buyer from Tours, the horse trader from Angers, and such gentry, not to mention an occasional traveling priest—I must tell the story of the shipwreck with the last bottle of wine. Three times, six, a dozen I told it, so that the *curé* and the *gendarme* knew it better than I, and jogged me as to details that I forgot. It made a fine story.

Then, after three years, the newspapers began this affair. M. Jerrard, the man who had warmed me when I was cold and wet, M. Jules Jerrard, a former chemist, was mentioned along with greater names in a plot to overthrow the republic. Ramberd, who was exiled for treason, Moullière the royalist, Charles Anjou the pretender—these and others, it seemed, had visited the flighty apothecary by night on the island of Raishe, at his farm which he called a castle.

A week after, one morning when I was late to breakfast—the night before had been the birthday celebration of the marquis—our good *curé* was reading the newspaper with more interest than he usually displayed in telling his beads.

"Hi, you, shipwreck!" he cried as I came in, still tasting the night before in the back of my mouth. "Here is news of your host of the island." He held the *Matin* in the air. "The military has gone out to capture him. One week, and it would have been too late. He planned a *coup d'état*, to set Charles on the throne and make himself prime minister with a pen behind his ear."

Papa Deguare sat chewing his toast, which he dipped into his coffee and then swept past his mustache with a fine gesture. For me, I approached the table slowly.

"So that was it!" I exclaimed. "It is plain now why the papers have made such a fuss."

"You say he attended church each Sunday?" asked the priest.

"And took his servant along," I added.

"Ah, too bad!" It was the priest again.

"Do not expect all the virtues between one pair of ears."

"It will be a long distance from his chin to his chest when they get him!" put in the *gendarme*, making a disgusting noise, and passing his finger across his own throat.

A sociable enough fellow, Papa Deguare, but vulgar in his expressions.

We waited without the patience we should have displayed for more news of the *affaire Jerrard*. The town was talking now. Heads were shaking in the public square, heads that never harbored a thought for France or against her; but the newspaper—really a necessary evil, I suppose, the press—the newspaper brought strange stories in the morning.

A company of marines had landed at the island in the Manche. They found the house stripped. Only a note remained for them, telling them that they were too late. Jules Jerrard was moving to less conspicuous lodgings. His plots, he hinted, were not destroyed—merely inconvenienced by a change of residence.

"*Voilà!*" it was Papa Deguare, the *brigadier* of *gendarmes*, pounding the table. "That man is no ordinary apothecary! He has spine under his uniform, as we say in the service. What a shame he should not turn his talents to the republic, instead of against it!"

The priest looked into the fire and said nothing. A French priest is supposed to say nothing when the virtue of the republic is the talk.

For my part, I was vaguely vexed. I was the notary, I had the honor of the nation in the seal at my right hand; yet this man had fed me, clothed me, and brought me back from a wet death to a hot breakfast. Should I chew my nails and mourn his escape, like a good notary, or wink at my mirror and pray for his safety, like a grateful guest?

Four days, five, the newspapers frothed with the story. M. Jerrard had been seen in Paris, in London, in Vienna, all at once. He had escaped to America and to China the same moment. He was in France, in England, aboard ship; he still was hiding on his island.

The world is harsh to a man, no matter how brave, when he has thrown rocks at sacred pigeons. From the Manche to the south coast, in Normandy, Maine, Touraine, the Angoumois, Périgord, and Gascony, every official went out in search of

M. Jerrard. Even in our quiet village, ten kilometers back from the Dordogne, old townsmen snapped their gums and declared that he should be hanged. All the country shouted for his head—all the peasantry, I mean, and the fat merchants and the editors in their chairs.

When you hear a statement made too often, you sometimes believe it, or half believe it, in spite of your own head and eyes. I do not know whether I believed.

III

AND now it was Sunday night, winter again, three years from the time when I borrowed a coat from this royalist on his island. The *curé* had come in from his church, Papa Deguare from his wife and the office of the *gendarmerie*. I had spent the day half on my bed, half wandering by the river, where I marveled at the ice. It was a cold winter, this last one, and ice came early to the pools beside the stream. It made fantastic particles on the edges of the still water, for no greater purpose, I suppose, than to amuse lazy fellows like myself.

We had the usual Sunday night supper—veal tongue sliced and pickled, bread from Saturday's baking, *chocolat*, an apple, and cheese. Ours is a provincial town, and in the provinces there are habits older than the oldest men who sit in the sun on the public square; and veal tongues, sliced and pickled, were the Sunday evening habit of the Boule d'Or.

The wine? Ah, the Sunday night wine was red, of course, but neither sweet nor sour, neither old nor new—not worth a smack of the lips or a scowl. It was wine, merely.

Papa Deguare was at the table before us, which was his custom. He was a large man, and had an appetite in proportion, for he spent many days upon a bicycle where the wind and the hills cried for food. When the *curé* and I came in, he rose stiffly, according to his habits, saluted, and did not seat himself again until the good priest had broken off a crust of bread.

Mme. Lamerre, the round and roisterous hostess of the Boule d'Or, was a woman of great spirit and small perception. She made as much over the sliced and pickled veal tongue as she did over half a dozen young chickens on a platter; but we had grown accustomed to her noise, as sailors grow accustomed to the whine of the sea,

or the miller to the constant cackle of his mill wings.

"Why the fourth place?" asked the *brigadier*, when *madame* came in with the sugar bowl, over which she always performed a rite when she set it before us, be it half full or only one-third.

"Ah, a gentleman traveler, a very fine gentleman! He has been here half the afternoon, sleeping. He begs that you go on with your meal. He will dine alone, later."

"A traveler?" The priest's eyes were jolly, for he had a fondness for company, and for the chance it gave him to exercise his tongue. "A wine merchant—what?"

"I did not inquire," confessed *madame*. "He was so much a gentleman—so *gentil*, you understand—that I did not insist on seeing his *permission*."

The *gendarme* growled.

"Oh, yes! A fine cape, and you never require papers, *madame*! As if the law says anything about the coats upon travelers' backs! It's the document in their pockets you examine before you give them room. It might be a robber, an anarchist. You'll undo us all yet!"

"It might be the gentleman of the island!" exclaimed the priest, with a nod, a wink, and a shake of his fat little stomach that went for a laugh. "What would you do, my brave *brigadier*, if the great M. Jerrard, enemy of our beloved republic"—he passed his napkin slyly across his tongue—"were here in your town? What you, *monsieur le notaire*?"

My two friends looked at my face, and saw there my own misgivings. Just what should I do?

Mme. Lamerre rushed back, interrupting my guess. Three small glasses of Oporto wine, with the compliments of the gentleman upstairs. He had a severe toothache, and would dine in his room, on soup. His servant had brought down the message.

The door behind her stood open, and the traveler's servant put his face into the light. It was a fat face, dull as a pumpkin, with eyes large and round and set far apart, like a Normandy cow. Do not think that I was not startled—or the serving man, either.

He was the first to find his wits, for his head snapped back into the kitchen like a turtle, and left me staring at the crack in the wall.

"Drink, man, drink!"

The *curé* was holding his glass toward mine. Old Papa Deguare clicked with us, and we drank. I sipped slowly, to benefit my startled digestion. Oporto wine is a very warm tonic, if taken in sips. The priest snuffed his nose as he swallowed, and Deguare took his glass with a great gulp, like the man at arms he was.

"What ails you?" The priest must have seen my face. I admit it felt green and prickly. "The wine—it was not bad?"

Papa Deguare looked at me, then at his own empty glass, and then at the priest. Mme. Lamerre had carried her chatter to the kitchen. We were alone.

"My friends"—I found myself catching at the tablecloth—"I saw the servant when he looked in the door. I recognized him. His name is Lombard. He belongs to—"

I did not speak the name. He had clothed me and breakfasted me, this fellow's master. He was hunted now, a runaway rabbit, with a force less kindly than the sea nipping his heels; for the sea is merely angry, and is not human enough to be vindictive. There is a difference—yes, indeed!

Monsieur le curé was leaning forward, staring hard at me under his tight black cap, which covered his bald spot as if it were some secret shame. Deguare, his gray hair ruffled and his hard eyes squinting, turned half around to look at the back of his chair, where he had hung his cartridge sling for better comfort while he dined.

"Jerrard?" he asked me, one arm still twisted behind him toward his belt and revolver.

I nodded. The priest's fat little stomach was not shaking now. He fell very silent—strangely so, for a man with such a fine trigger on his tongue. Even at that he was the first to speak, and his words struck us all aslant.

"My friends!" he said simply enough. He had studied eloquence in Paris. "We have drunk the gentleman's wine. Perhaps it is best not to inquire further. The lamp is very dim." He turned to me. "Surely you were mistaken. You could not recognize the servant in such a poor light!"

What matter if I told the truth or lied? They knew the truth. I still chewed at my words when the door opened quickly from the kitchen, and a gentleman stepped in. He saw us all at once, me with the perspiration on my brow, the *curé* leaning for-

ward and pretending to be at ease, and old Deguare still half turned toward his sling, which hung on the chair.

IV

M. JERRARD—for it was he who stood facing us—was as cool as a judge at a fête, his nose still twisted to one side, and that sly smile working all over his mouth. We did not move, not one of us. His picture had been in the papers. Papa Deguare and the *curé* needed no introduction.

"A marooned man's pardon!" he said, bowing very gravely, first to the priest, then to me, and finally to the *brigadier*. "I was in my room when my servant came up to report the distinguished company. By your leave?"

His hand dropped to the back of the chair nearest him—ah, he was a clever scamp!—and he eyed the empty glasses of his own furnishing before our plates. Perhaps we nodded. At any rate, he pulled the chair under him, planted his elbows on the table, and whipped out his napkin.

"I rarely choose company," he admitted. "I prefer dining alone."

"A very healthy preference!" growled the *brigadier*.

"So I think. There is much of the falling sickness about, I understand. They tell me that in the north there are whole communities gone suddenly blind, and others who are mad—staring mad, gentlemen, thinking they see things. No, indeed, I usually dine alone; but when my servant explained that you were here, and described your looks and your manners, I could not resist. Man craves his fellows, you know!"

It was plain as powder that he meant not to recognize me, and that he was aware of our recognition. He was cool, pulling the ends of his fine waxed mustache and tucking his napkin into the slit of his vest. With his red hair piled up atop his head, he was not a bad-looking rogue, for all the schemes that were jostling in his skull.

But Papa Deguare was an old campaigner, a man of his weapons, not to be silenced by finery or a glib tongue.

"I am a *gendarme*!" he said, with a warning in his throat, and half rose from his chair.

"Ah, I see! You have the Médaille Militaire, and the Croix de Guerre, too!" Jerrard leaned forward, the better to examine the decorations pinned boldly across the *gendarme's* chest. "And the war in

China! A splendid record, *mon brigadier*—splendid! But your glass is empty—I am blind!"

He clapped his hands for *madame*.

"However, I am not blind!" returned Deguare, who was a surly dog when he started growling over duty.

"The wine, *madame*!" Jerrard was saying. "Fill the glasses again. My new friends thirst!" He ignored Deguare's last threat. "I hope you liked your little glass? I take great pleasure in the grape. It makes for comradeship."

When the squat bottle had made the rounds, Jerrard tipped glasses first with me, then with the priest—for he sensed our confusion, and knew we should follow his lead—and, finally, with a bow, he lifted his glass to Papa Deguare.

"To the brave man of battles!" he cried.

We all drank, and that settled the matter. Not one of us would harm him—I, who had worn his own coat on my shoulders when I was in need; Deguare, who had drunk his wine, not once, but twice, and knowingly; and the *curé*, who always looked slyly down his nose when men exclaimed about the glory of the republic and the wickedness of kings. He was an old *curé*, you understand. He remembered Prince Louis Napoleon.

The veal tongue was on the table now, with Mme. Lamerre curtsying heavily for the benefit of our guest. I fell silent. The *curé*, who seemed to enjoy his appetite, handled an agile knife and fork, keeping his eyes down in the proper manner that he has. Papa Deguare, after blowing through his nose and staring at M. Jerrard until that gentleman raised his eyebrows and stared back, finally bit off half a slice of meat, and then stopped eating altogether.

Our guest had no such uneasiness. He passed his plate for more of the pickled veal, smacked his lips over it, and complimented *madame* upon it so extravagantly that she blushed purple with pride. We were poor hosts, she thought. Even the fat old cat could not but remark our silence and our guest's rapid tongue. The old cat kept its peace, but Mme. Lamerre had thicker wit.

"*Monsieur le notaire* has a story he can tell you!" she exclaimed, in one of her bursts from the kitchen.

She was gone again before I could swallow my breath, and then once more she plunged into the room. The bottle in her

hand was not the *vin ordinaire* with which we usually finished supper. There was green mold about the cork.

"He has a story to tell that is very interesting," the gabbling old creature went on. "He was shipwrecked."

"Shipwrecked?"

Jerrard looked across at me with wonder in his eyes. Why didn't the man go on the stage, instead of into slippery politics?

"Surely he must tell us the story!" cried the fugitive.

Papa Deguare blew through his nose like a railway engine. The priest—would you believe it?—the priest was smiling such a wise smile as cats and dogs use when they think they are not observed.

"It is elegant, the fine words he has!" cried *madame*, while my vexation lifted at the roots of my hair. "No wonder he's a notary!"

If Jules Jerrard laughed, he held it on the inside of his face, for he was grave as a sexton when he leaned across toward me.

"Certainly, *monsieur*, I am interested. Shipwrecked! Tell us!"

The noise on my left was Papa Deguare, growling and scraping his boots. The *curé* looked at the ceiling, wrinkling first his forehead and then his lips. I cleared my throat.

"Another time!" I insisted.

A polite murmur of regret on the part of Jerrard was drowned by the cry of the good but stupid *madame*. At last, unwillingly, I began the tale.

I told of the wreck, of the bale of bed springs, of the sandy spit, and of the servant at the gate. I told of breakfast, of the kindness of my host, of his taking me to the mainland when he rowed to the church.

Our landlady stood by the table, entranced, as she always was. She never had seen more water than the river and her own duck pond, poor woman! Jerrard was polite, intent, as if my poor words were all news to him. He was a cool one, that schemer!

"And that is not the end!" she insisted, noisy wretch, when I had finished. "You did not tell who it was gave you the breakfast and coat!"

Perhaps I was confused. It was more than human to be calm in the face of such trying circumstances; but *madame* took the words from my teeth.

"Jerrard, it was!" She flew into half a fury. "Jerrard, the villain! Think,

monsieur, a man who would help a shipwrecked passenger turning to such vile tricks! If I had my hand on him!"

She thrashed the table realistically with a huge fist. Jerrard seemed startled. Deguare grunted, amused for once. The *curé* waved her aside, weary of her meddling tongue.

"The royalist Jerrard?" said our visitor, looking at us all, eye to eye, calmly, almost in challenge. "I hear he has escaped to America. I have the authority of the *gendarme* at the last village for that. It is regrettable that he has not been captured."

"Never fear—all *gendarmes* are not fools. He'll be captured!" Deguare scowled over his glass. "Before many hours he'll be in the hands of the proper agents!"

"Perhaps!" Jerrard waved his hand, a little too airily to be quite convincing. "But will it not be a pity?"

"Yes, a pity!" The priest spoke in spite of his caution. "There are too few gentlemen of wit left in a numb world. When one plans a—shall we say a stroke of genius?—then he is a traitor, a fiend, a thief! How, I ask you, was this republic formed? Some quiet café meeting, with *bocks* on the table and children in their mothers' arms? No, my friends—it was a bloody affair! Why, in the churches—"

"We know that story of the churches, *monsieur le curé*," the *brigadier* interrupted. "That was long ago. Now we must defend the republic. We must step on any who plan to undermine it. Two duties Frenchmen have, and a third. Duty to our church and our state, even *gendarmes* know them, and a personal duty—to return kindness in kind; but the republic and the church come first."

"Excellent teaching!" agreed Jerrard.

"Excellent, indeed!" Deguare replied, with heat on his tongue. "Here we are, a notary"—he jerked his chin at me—"a *gendarme* and a priest. Could any trio be more respectable? And there you sit, our enemy, stuffing us with your wine and your lies. We know you, M. Jerrard!"

For a moment neither the priest nor I spoke. Deguare, holding himself stiff, his plump hands upon his knees and his elbows sticking out like weather vanes, stared at the fellow whom he accused. Jerrard, hesitating only long enough to pack a cigarette on the back of his hand, nodded slightly.

"Jules Jerrard, at your service."

Ah, the nerve of the man! He lighted the cigarette, looking down the length of it idly. He puffed a blue cloud that drew over his head like a hood. His long fingers did not tremble, his eye was as wide open as before—no wider.

"You admit it, then?" said Deguare, reaching once more for the cartridge sling on his chair.

"Why deny it, in the face of such clever gentlemen? One of you has felt the easy shadow of my own roof on his back—aye, and has worn my own coat across his chilly shoulders. Another is a holy man, a priest, who will have naught to do with the persecution of poor souls. You—ah, a soldier of the republic! But you are brave, *brigadier*, you will not join the thousand bailiffs who are rushing after a single man?"

He hesitated. Deguare reached nearer his gun.

"Take your pistol," our guest said. "Point it, if you wish. I am not violent. I tell you any cur can bark along with the pack. Listen! Here I am, alone, Jules Jerrard—not even a pistol, *brigadier*. I think too much of a Frenchman to carry one. I have my wits. They are sufficient. Now, here is your village, eyes to cracks, ears to keyholes, pistols in every house, all waiting for me—for Jules Jerrard; and not your village alone, but ten thousand others, all the same, all crying for the blood of that Frenchman, Jerrard. Fifty thousand *gendarmes*, with their guns and their ink bottles, *brigadier*, all hunting me—and I, Jules Jerrard, alone!"

"Your tongue will lead your head to the basket!" growled Deguare. "What care I how the rest of France is acting? I have my duty!"

"Along with the rabble? Very well, I am your prisoner; but I remind you that I am alone, against ten millions. If that is fair sport, then—perhaps France deserves no better than the wormy republic she has!"

We all sat silent for a moment. The *gendarme* dropped his hand, not knowing what to do. He had drunk the rascal's wine, he was a soldier, and he loved courage for its own sake.

Jerrard was the first to speak. He had fallen into a black look, there in his seat, scowling at the table, but his teeth were shining and his red head stood up straight while he called for more wine. Oporto he

wanted. The man could drink a quart of it himself!

"To the health of the clergy, the notaries, and the sword!" the wild fellow proposed; but before he pushed forward his glass, a laugh was lighting up his eyes. "And to great odds!" he cried.

The edges of our goblets clicked, and we drank fast, all together.

V

THERE was a scream in the outer room. A door slammed. Mme. Lamerre shouted in her kitchen.

Deguare was on his feet, being the quickest to hear the call. The priest followed, and I more slowly. Only our guest remained seated, turning to look over his shoulder.

There, on the hearth, as we saw through the open door, Anna, the serving maid, was wriggling in the arms of Lombard, Jerrard's tall, cow-eyed servant. She was a red-lipped wench, in the light of the cooking fire. She might have turned heads less thick than his.

He kissed her—that was all he had intended. He kissed her loudly on the lips, and dropped her, still screaming. Then he skipped to our door.

"Your pardon!" he said, not to us but to Jerrard.

He looked a different man, here by the side of his lively master. It is foolish ever to think that a smart wit will keep a dull servant, no matter how round his face.

"He kissed the kitchen maid!" howled *madame*.

The fellow did not deny it. He had something else to say.

"I was at the station, as you said, *mon-sieur*," he told Jerrard. "There were six of them got off the train. They are coming this way now. Perhaps it is best to hurry."

"He kissed the kitchen maid!" repeated *madame*.

"Yes, *madame*." Lombard bowed stiffly. "Why not? She has the reddest lips I've seen in seven leagues of wandering!"

Anna looked up, with eyes as large as his own, as if she were trying to answer but could not. Mme. Lamerre stood undecided. Lombard shifted his feet.

"You go!" Jerrard directed suddenly. "Run along! I have been captured already by this fearless *gendarme*. The clergy and the law are witnesses that I sur-

rendered like a gentleman, as Jules Jerrard must!"

"Jerrard!" stammered Mme. Lamerre.

Lombard threw his cap at the hooks in the corner, and stepped into the room as if he meant to stay. Some one banged on the front door. *Madame*, staring, looked first at the *gendarme*, and then at the priest. She reached out her hand toward me.

The good *curé* had stopped his smiling, and perspiration streaked the *brigadier's* face. Anna, the kitchen maid, was first to move. She skipped across to Lombard and whispered in his ear. Perhaps she had liked the lawless kiss, after all.

We all looked away, but who could help hearing when he smacked her properly again? Perhaps it was this, perhaps the new banging at the door, that aroused old Papa Deguare. Jerrard still sat at the end of the table, cool, deliberate, unafraid.

"Mme. Lamerre!" The *gendarme* was buttoning on his belt. "That trap door, *madame!*"

M. Jules Jerrard descended to the cellar first, walking slowly, for the steps were steep. Lombard followed. We closed the trap and lifted the dining table back over it. The red-lipped Anna scuffed her feet as she went to open the front door.

We heard her exclamation. Papa Deguare was wanted. Mme. Lamerre, who had lived an uneventful life, gasped from such great adventure.

"Jerrard?" There was genuine alarm in Deguare's voice. "Not in my town?"

He came back after his hat.

"Police agents from Paris," he reported crossly. "That rascal Jules Jerrard was seen here this morning, in this neighborhood, and his servant with him!"

He pinched Anna's pink ear as he stamped out. The *curé* tilted his glass into the air. Then he smiled again, and once more his fat little stomach was shaking. The house became still.

Mme. Lamerre plumped down in the empty place at the end of the table, Anna in the vacant chair of Papa Deguare. Perhaps we were there for an hour, perhaps longer. Not one of us spoke; only once did any sound come from the basement. It was a short laugh, too shrill for proper caution. Anna rapped on the floor with her wooden sole.

Papa Deguare came back finally, breathless, bewildered. The *curé* asked a question with his eyebrows.

"The Paris police proceeded east," our *brigadier* volunteered.

The priest jerked his chin toward the floor.

"What else?" he asked.

"I am going to bed," growled Deguare. "I suggest that our friend, *monsieur le notaire*, should also go to bed. We are servants of France. To-morrow morning, at seven o'clock, I shall begin a search for that rascal, Jules Jerrard—here in this hotel, in every basement in town, if necessary, in every attic, under every bed! Seven o'clock, understand?"

The priest nodded sleepily. He was smiling when I went upstairs.

From the window of my room, where I watched the deserted village square, I saw four figures move out from the shadow of the Boule d'Or and cross the street. An hour later one man came back. He passed by our porch and entered the grounds of the priest's house, between the inn and the church.

And that is the end of the story of M. Jules Jerrard—unless it was merely a coincidence that Anna, the kitchen maid, was not on hand next morning to sand the floor in the hotel. For many weeks more we saw nothing of her, except on Saturday afternoons, when she knew that Papa Deguare would be absent, riding his bicycle to the next town. On Saturday nights she went away from the hotel hurriedly, with a large basket loaded with food.

Oh, yes, I believe I have heard one other thing. Mme. Lamerre owned a ragged little farm some ten kilometers from the village, on a narrow *route communale* where even *gendarmes* never bothered to stop. A foolish, fat old woman, our *madame*, who in all her dull life had one adventure, and insisted on keeping it!

Anna? She wrote from America. The letter came yesterday, and started my tongue to wagging. She says that Lombard, her husband, is a valet in the house of a French manufacturer, a chemist who makes soaps and powders with the trade name of Coup d'État, and who is very rich. She is a maid in the same house.

Monsieur le curé is laughing. Papa Deguare, being a cheerful soul when he wishes, is trying to change the subject to the newest murder in Paris. Mme. Lamerre is making great eyes and clucking over the pickled veal's tongue. The republic has forgotten M. Jules Jerrard.

A Private Fight

YANKEE SAILORS MAY HATE LIMEJUICERS, BUT BLOOD, AFTER ALL, IS THICKER THAN WATER

By John Scarry

THE freighter Dedham lay off Pasuruan, which gasps by day and stirs indolently by night in the heat of Java's fetid coast. The sun had gone down, and the false light of evening was weirdly bathing the decks, ripening the buff of masts and ventilators and stack into rich orange.

Smoking and yarning, some ten or a dozen Yankee sailormen lounged in unstudied attitudes on No. 5 hatch. Their work was done.

Presently three men detached themselves from the group. Envious but good-natured comments followed them along the after well deck, and the three good-naturedly replied. They mounted the amidships companionway, walked forward through the passage, and descended the swaying ladder. They entered a broad-beamed native tam-bangan, and profanely ordered the brown-skinned Javanese boatmen to hurry them ashore.

"Bangkusir's beer 'll be good an' cold," gloated one of them—Blackie White.

"I'll say!" said Jake the Plumber.

"Let's go" was Winter Wheat's emphatic contribution.

There was nothing extraordinary about these young men. They appeared to be of the average merchant mariner type—muscular, thirsty, and devil-may-care. Of the lot, Winter Wheat was perhaps the most average specimen, for Jake the Plumber's intelligence was sometimes sadly deficient, and Blackie was known to possess smarter wits than his fellows.

Blackie was smart-looking. Alertness was part of his every movement. His keen blue eyes peered restlessly from under a cloth cap. His mouth was humorous, his chin firm. Wrinkles bespoke a readiness to smile; but Blackie was not smiling now.

Standing with his hands on his hips, he gazed with supreme contempt on a rusty British tramp near by. It was Winter Wheat, however, who first spoke his mind.

"A limey!" said he, and spat over the side. "Gawd, don't I hate a limey?"

"Who don't?" said Jake the Plumber.

Blackie grimly continued his disapproving survey.

"I hate 'em," he tersely declared. "I only wish Hard Jack was with us."

It was not long before their ferry slowed to the landing under Pasuruan pier. Winter Wheat, who always acted as treasurer for the party, put his hand in his pocket; but Blackie elbowed his way roughly between his comrade and the expectant natives. He coolly offered a cigar store coupon as payment.

Jake the Plumber gaped in admiring silence; but the trick failed. There arose from the boatmen an instant clamor of protest. There could be no doubt about their having learned a few things from American freighters which had preceded the Dedham at Pasuruan. They united vociferously in demanding metal money.

Blackie shrugged.

"No harm tryin'," said he.

"Well, I guess there ain't!" Jake the Plumber burst into uncontrolled laughter. "By gosh, Blackie, if you ain't a son of a gun!"

"Pay 'em, Winter, an' come on."

Winter grudgingly donated seventy-five Dutch cents.

"That game's only good in Africa," he told Blackie; "but I wish you'd got away with it. We ain't got much, an' that would 'a' meant another bottle."

Jake grunted.

"I hit the old man fer even a measly case note, an' he wouldn't come across."

"Ar-r-r—he's a tightwad!"

Blackie led the way up a bamboo ladder to the pier. Bangkusir's lay on a quiet, unlighted street of kenari trees, in the no man's land between the water front and the residential district. It was a plastered brick affair that was three-quarters veranda—a sailors' hangout, where festive customers could dare anything short of murder. Bangkusir never charged for broken furniture and glassware. Indirectly, though, he got his money back threefold.

A rank, damp garden of banana plants shadowed the entrance, a fifty-foot gravel path; but a veritable jungle could not deaden the sounds of what often occurred within. So it happened that while yet a hundred yards away the Americans were aware of an uproar.

"A fight!" cried Blackie. "Come on, fellers!"

The fight had ended, however, by the time they arrived on the table-strewn pavilion. Still running, they had been treated to a brief vision of five hulking brutes being mauled by three middle-sized men and one giant. Blackie had seen four of the hulking brutes take to their heels, and the fifth lifted and hurled bodily after them.

This last had been the work of the giant. It was now plain enough, too, that the vanquished were Dutchmen and the victors Britishers.

"Laodamia an' Haarlemdyk," Blackie observed, naming the rusty tramp that he had scorned and another ship that was lying in the roadstead.

"Lousy limejuicers!" snarled Winter Wheat, in a tone that carried only to his companions.

"Lousy's right, I'll say!" agreed Jake the Plumber.

Then the giant turned from the brawl. He squared his massive shoulders, fell into an undeniable strut, and laughed sneeringly the while. It could not escape the men of the Dedham that here stood at least two hundred and twenty pounds of solid bone and muscle. The big man was clean-built and formidable appearing—very formidable. His huge, hairy chest showed in the opening of his undershirt.

In a curious silence the Americans stood directly inside the entrance to the big veranda. They gazed upon this Hercules, upon the vestiges of conflict, and upon the middle-sized chaps, who were appraising their bruised knuckles. Winter Wheat

started cursing under his breath; but Blackie, who was by way of being a politician, dragged him by the elbow to a corner table.

Nevertheless, instinctive hostility had flamed in Blackie's mind. He expressed the thought that lay uppermost.

"Wish Hard Jack was with us!" said he.

"I'll say!" came fervently from the others.

The giant bore down on them, leaving his comrades waiting and whispering. The big fellow grinned a broad, sun-reddened grin. Was there guile behind this sudden amiability? If so, the Americans were not immediately aware of it. They coolly awaited the Britisher's approach.

"Ah there, Yanks!" was the greeting. "Come over an' sit with us. It's my shout. It's 'Arry Joy's shout, what once was a champeen in London. Come on over, Yanks! Did ye see what I done to them 'Uns?"

"Huns! Hollanders ain't no—"

"Why, thanks, feller," said Blackie hastily, stopping Winter Wheat's hot counter with an elbow jab; "but bring yer gang over here. We can shove a couple o' tables together against the rail."

Harry Joy swung away to summon the other Britishers.

"Don't be a damn fool!" Blackie rasped at Winter Wheat, in a low voice. "They're all half shot, ain't they?—an' we're about broke. We'll get a couple o' drinks out of 'em first."

Blackie's strategy was impressive, and Winter Wheat concealed his animosity. He helped Blackie with the chairs and tables, but, as he did so, a constant low rumbling issued from his throat. Then this died, too, as the four strangers came scuffling toward the rail.

A minute or two later the big Britisher's shout—seven quart bottles of Danish beer—graced the board where these Anglo-Saxon cousins sat in apparent good-fellowship. Glasses clinked all around. There had been no thought of introductions. Conversation brought out the fact that Harry Joy's three mates were Liverpool, Al, and Barlow.

Whatever else might be said about them, they were efficient drinkers—a match for the Americans in that respect. In a very short time it fell upon Winter Wheat to buy the second round. This, Blackie knew, practically flattened the Yankee exchequer;

but one of the limejuicers would have to buy next, and the Americans would be at least one drink ahead.

II

"THEY give us lip," explained Harry Joy, who from the beginning had dominated the tables and the talk. "They give us lip, an' Britishers don't take no lip from no bloody 'Uns; so we bashed 'em. You seen me 'eave the larst one?"

"Aye, we seen ye, 'Arry!" came from Barlow.

"Five of 'em, wasn't they? But what chance 'as five with four Britishers?"

"'Ear, 'ear!" Barlow applauded.

"The bulldog breed, eh, 'Arry?"

Harry nodded emphatically.

"Aye, Liverpool, lad—the bulldog breed! Breed tells wherever ye go. Ye can bank on the bulldog, says I, in wars or in affairs of this nature."

Whereupon it appeared that Winter Wheat had heard all he intended to hear in that vein. There was a movement. Blackie saw his comrade straighten in his chair and smash his half empty glass back on the table.

"Bulldog, hell!" flung Winter. "What d'ye mean, bank on him? I guess there's been wars, all right, when ye couldn't bank on yer lousy bulldog!"

A silence fell. Blackie knew his little game had now been played to its limit. Watching narrowly, it occurred to him that Harry Joy had been waiting for some such opportunity. A look of sly satisfaction came into the big man's eyes, and he grinned at Winter Wheat.

"Bash 'is 'ead in, Barlow," he directed, without heat.

Barlow stood up. That brought them all to their feet. Blackie, though he prized cold beer above fighting, was not a man to stand aside when it came down to cases. Jake the Plumber, who until now had remained silent, would never hold back from any embroilment in which Blackie was engaged.

There followed a swift moment of confusion. The three Americans stood shoulder to shoulder, hunched forward a little, waiting for the rush.

"Take yer men, Al an' Liverpool!" they heard.

To Blackie's astonishment, he saw Harry Joy preparing to assume no active part in the brawl. Harry began to plow around

in a big circle. Swinging wide with his ponderous arms, he cleared a sufficient space of tables and chairs. He felt sure of his mates, of course; and probably, next to fighting, he liked to watch a fight.

"Take yer men, Al an' Liverpool an' Barlow, an' bash 'em, or 'ear from me!"

They must have heard from the big man later, for not one of them successfully bashed his opponent. Winter, Blackie, and Jake had considerably more science, and perhaps stouter hearts, than the Hollanders who had fled a few minutes before. Then, too, were they not fighting limejuicers? Joyfully they met the first assault—joyfully they bored into the offensive.

Liverpool fell to Blackie's lot, and for a time the battle was furious; but the American was as cool as if boxing with one of his pals on board ship. There was a clinch. Blackie managed to keep one hand free, and with that free hand he pounded away at Liverpool's ribs. The Britisher winced and tore himself loose. As he fell back, Blackie lifted a right uppercut that put his opponent definitely out of the picture.

Liverpool's mates had fared no better—worse, indeed, for Winter and Jake were waiting when Blackie finished.

"Get the big hound!" snarled Winter, and of one accord the victors moved across toward Harry Joy.

Called upon to defend himself, Harry acted with speed and skill. It would seem that his boast about having been a champion in London had not been empty. He struck nine sledgehammer blows in all, straight from his powerful shoulders. After the first three the Americans' bodies were tangled with the table legs. Three more—they went down again. Then a final three, and they were licked beyond question.

"Up on yer feet, ye blasted Yankees!"

Big Harry stood over them, begging them to get up for more; but none of them could stand any more. Jake was almost out. Winter's forearm was red with blood from his nose. Blackie's head reeled. He stupidly understood that he had opposed himself to a human pile driver. Nevertheless, he spat defiance through puffed lips.

"We'll come back, don't you worry! We'll come on Monday night, limejuicer!" Blackie promised. "An' we'll have Hard Jack Rafferty along to take your measure!"

"Bring yer 'Ard Jack Dempsey, fer all I care!" laughed the giant.

He retrieved a glass and a bottle of beer.

Between swallows he hurled bragging gibes at the Americans until they were out of earshot along the street.

III

ONCE back on the water front, the men of the Dedham encountered the five whipped Hollanders. As Blackie had supposed, these men were from the Haarlem-dyk. They crowded around Blackie. Signs of blood, of course, induced their inquiries. Upon learning what had taken place, they were full of a plan to join forces with the Americans and return to Bangkunsir's, to wreak vengeance upon the Britons.

"*Wy zullen ze stuk slaan!*" growled one.

"We shall be allies, yes?" suggested another; but Blackie demurred.

"Why not?" demanded Winter Wheat. "Now's our chance, ain't it? We'll not get ashore again in a hurry. All we got's jest money enough to get us out to the ship. Come on! Let's go get 'em, Blackie!"

"Nix! Nix!" was the swift answer. "Wait till Monday, till Hard Jack's with us. We got to let him in on this. Don't you worry at all, Winter—I'll get you all ashore all right!" Blackie earnestly declared, as he urged his battered comrades back to the landing.

Hard Jack Rafferty! There was the solution. Blackie suddenly knew that he wanted Harry Joy licked by one man. For seven years or more, he reflected, Hard Jack had made a specialty of fighting, on ship and on shore, with reason or without. He was known in the sailors' dives of every continent. Yes—Hard Jack was the man!

Of course, Blackie would have liked the job for himself; but since that was out of the question, it would be best to call on a shipmate. Harry Joy had to be licked, and licked properly—first, because he was a bragging bully, but principally because he was a low-down limejuicer.

Blackie touched his hurt mouth, and cursed. In common with thousands of others, he had never tried to analyze his hatred for Britishers. It was part of his heritage, a tradition of his blood and his trade; for nowhere is the rivalry between the branches of the English-speaking race so acute as among those who follow the sea.

"If he's a limey," says the sailor, "and occasion offers, plug him!"

Nine times out of ten he furnishes good

sport—better sport than can be hoped for from a Squarehead or a Spig; and ninety-nine times out of a hundred, simply for being a Britisher, he deserves his beating.

"Hard Jack 'll clean up on him!" Blackie assured himself, as he climbed the ship's ladder to the deck of the Dedham. "He'll stand the big stiff on his ear!"

IV

THE Dedham was taking on a cargo of sugar for Mediterranean ports. The work had lasted nearly a fortnight, for Pasuruan was maddeningly slow to disgorge. Sea watches had been broken upon arrival in the roadstead. During the first week the water tenders had stood eight-hour tricks below. This week that honor was held by the firemen, of whom Jack Rafferty was one; so, when the vanquished three came on board, Blackie knew that Hard Jack was alone in the bowels of the ship.

Blackie had no intention of waiting. Leading his companions along the port passageway, he came to the iron ladder that led straight down the fireroom bulkhead. Hard Jack looked up from polishing the brass disks on the oil manifold to greet his untimely visitors.

"What's up?" he asked.

"A fight," said Blackie.

There followed a detailed account of the night's doings ashore.

Hard Jack was about thirty years old. He was not huge in stature, like Harry Joy. He stood no taller than five feet nine; but the breadth of him bespoke the strength of two and endurance beyond description. His step was light, swaying a little with the drive of iron thighs and the grace of narrow hips. He was red-headed and dark-eyed. His outjutting chin and hooked nose gave him an expression of undoubted pug-nacity. Still, his thoughts now brought a twinkle to his eye.

He seemed vastly amused. They got licked, eh? And they wanted his help? With a bunch of limeys! Oh, boy! Nothing, Jack vowed, did he like so much as a good brawl—especially a brawl with limejuicers. Just bring them on, the quicker the better!

Monday night, eh? At Blackie's description of Harry Joy, Jack Rafferty's left hand traveled along the brawn of his good right arm.

"The water tenders 'll be back on the job again on Monday. So dig up the jack,

Blackie," he concluded. "It's up to you to get us ashore."

All the preliminaries, therefore, fell upon Blackie's hands. It was fortunate that he had something under his hat besides his hair; for delay after delay had long since ruined the disposition of the Dedham's skipper. Perhaps he fancied the Haarlem-dyk, whose berth was some five hundred fathoms astern, to be getting the best of the loading. Perhaps he saw in the newly arrived Laodamia another undesired rival for the dribblings from the interior mills. In any case, he was unapproachable.

Jake the Plumber, who had been refused a dollar, was not alone. Not even the officers could touch the old man for a cent.

The crew was broke to a man, and desperate about it. They had smokes enough, to be sure, for the slop chest, in charge of the supercargo, dispensed credit generously; but there was no cash money, so there was no beer.

On Monday night, however, Blackie White was exultant in a repressed sort of way as he stepped quietly into the firemen's forecabin, where he found Jake the Plumber slowly pulling on a pair of oil-soaked boots. Except for Jake and Hard Jack, the black gang were all Spigs; so, before speaking, Blackie made sure that none of these was present.

"Come on!" he then commanded. "Snap into it! We got ten guilders."

Jake the Plumber raised a blank countenance, and his mouth opened wide.

"Where the hell did we get it?"

"From that stevedore half-caste. We bought five dollars' worth of Carolina Straight Cuts an' sold 'em to him fer ten guilders. Boy, we go ashore!"

"I'll say we do! Gosh!" Jake breathed. "Gosh, Blackie, I'll say your mother didn't raise no foolish children!"

"Come on! We're holdin' the boat."

"Who's we?"

Blackie looked witheringly through the gloom.

"Me an' Hard Jack an' Winter Wheat, of course. Come on, you dumb-bell! We got a fight on, ain't we? An' after we fight, we drink!"

"Gosh, I'll say we drink!"

They went as they were—four men in dungarees and undershirts. Three native boatmen, rich brown in the flood of electricity alongside and black in the outer darkness, bent to their short paddles.

There was no wind. The tambangan drove slowly over a roadstead calm as a mill pond. Lights stabbed the night from ramshackle shops ashore. Great godowns stood shoulder to dark shoulder against the twinkling sky.

Winter Wheat snorted as they passed the Laodamia.

"All I want's another crack at that Barlow! Gawd, I hate 'em!"

"Me, too," said Hard Jack Rafferty, caressing his muscle; "but they can fight—some of them," he conceded. "They fight fair, too."

Blackie could feel himself coloring. Memory of that three-man assault on Harry Joy rankled a little. Perhaps it was just as well that they had got the worst of it. Anyway, he recalled with some satisfaction, it had been his dissuasion that had kept the Hollanders out of the affair. That helped.

"They ain't bad fellers, though, them Holland Dutch," he mused aloud.

"Sure!" Jake agreed. "Remember we was talkin' to them guys from the Haarlem-dyk. They said all the Holland Dutch like Americans."

Which bit of evidence was accepted as a point in favor of the Netherlands; but the subject had to die in their anticipation of the night's work. They took to urging the boatmen to greater efforts.

Soon they landed, and four abreast they swung eastward along the water front. The narrow street was crowded. Lumbering bullock carts, late from the day's labors, creaked and groaned the torment of unoled axles. Chattering, half naked coolies ambled from shop to shop, prodigally spending the silver their toil had earned. Native clerks and warehouse employees, foppish in white coats and rustling batik sarongs, idled along, ogling and sightseeing and gossiping. Here and there street vendors had established themselves, their peanut oil lamps pricking red holes in the dust clouds and darkness, their inhuman cries rising like crow calls above the hum and clatter of night life.

But everything had to give way to the sailormen. Although the Americans' progress was not unduly forceful, a wide path opened in front of them, as if they were some thundering apparatus for fighting fire. This deference caused the white men no astonishment. They expected it.

Steadily, then, around a swarming cor-

ner—and suddenly they had left the crowded thoroughfares behind them. Ahead was the cavernous blackness of the kenari-bordered avenue; far ahead was a faint blot of yellow light which marked the entrance to Bangkusir's bar. Involuntarily, it seemed, their pace quickened into a jog.

"Hope they'll be there," said Winter.

"They'll be there, all right!"

"Hope that guy can fight," grumbled Hard Jack.

Blackie rubbed his jaw.

"Well, me an' Jake an' Winter can swear he packs a mean wallop!"

Too mean, indeed—and that fact was making Blackie feel anything but joyful. He would have given everything he possessed to be the one who was to face Harry Joy. The big stiff! Never in years had Blackie's mind conceived such an instant and bitter antipathy. The thought of attending to Liverpool again brought no buoyancy of spirit. His fists—his whole being, indeed—itched for a crack at the giant!

No use, though. A man had to recognize his own limits. No one but Hard Jack could stand up to Harry.

Blackie was at Hard Jack's shoulder as they entered Bangkusir's. The limejuicers were waiting.

"That's him!" said Blackie briefly, as he pointed out Harry Joy to his champion.

V

A CERTAIN silence had fallen when the Americans came up on the veranda. Barlow and Al and Liverpool sprang to their feet. It was obvious enough from their eagerness that Harry Joy had had them to task. Their eyes were hotly intent upon the men they had faced a few nights before. Still they waited, apparently watching their leader for a sign to cut loose; but Harry Joy remained seated, grinning.

"So you come back fer more, Yanks?" said he in a bantering tone. "An' this is the 'Ard Whatever-Is-Name-Is you brought along fer me? Now"—Harry laid his finger alongside his nose and deliberated—" 'e don't look 'ard."

"Cut it!" Hard Jack came back viciously. Blackie thrilled to the stern challenge of his shipmate. Jack would brook no delay in coming to grips. "Cut the talk, ye limejuicin' mouth artist! Stand out here!"

"'Op, lads!" said Harry briskly. "'Op into them bloody Yanks!"

His satellites hopped. This time there was no one to clear a space; but the first flurry of the minor conflicts upset two tables and several chairs. Blackie wanted to watch Hard Jack and Harry Joy, but his own man pressed. It occurred to him that if he polished off Liverpool quickly this second time, the opportunity would be his to view the main event. With that thought in mind, he tore into his opponent.

It was destined not to be so easy. Liverpool must have been full of an ambition similar to the one that possessed his antagonist. With a bellow, he came leaping in as if hurled from a catapult. Both his arms were moving expertly in front of his body. He shot out his left with such force as would have lifted Blackie's head off, had it struck home.

Blackie shifted slightly to one side, and stepped forward. Naturally a cautious fighter, he quickly discarded the rash plan he had formed. Two or three light blows with his left served mostly to give him an idea of distance. Better be sure than sorry.

The Britisher was clever, too. He now adopted the same tactics; and Blackie stepped back each time. Then Blackie had to lift his left to the crook of Liverpool's suddenly swung right arm. He ducked and drove in with his right to Liverpool's ribs. He saw the other's right come around again, but could not avoid it. It caught the American a terrific blow on the side of the head. Blackie only laughed.

He advanced again, and there followed some furious in-fighting. Twice he felt Liverpool's fists glance off his head. This was dangerous. If one of them ever landed squarely! So Blackie put all his power into a crashing jolt that found its mark over the Britisher's heart. He heard Liverpool grunt, and felt him slip forward into a clinch.

A clinch! Blackie remembered that his first victory had come at a moment of disentangling; and another second proved that Liverpool's memory was not so good. The Britisher struggled back from Blackie's punishing jabs. Again he left himself uncovered. Again he took a stiff one on the point of the jaw, and forthwith collapsed on the floor.

This achievement, however, brought Blackie no second's breathing space; for Jake the Plumber had been similarly served, and Al was looking for another victim.

Al was not even breathing hard. His grin was confident, if crooked. He now flung heavy sarcasms at Blackie; but he advanced warily, as if convinced that the American was a foeman worthy of all his skill. For a minute or two they fought at long range; then a flailing swing of Al's right caught Blackie full on the mouth. An inch lower, and Blackie would undoubtedly have been knocked out. Instead, he was stung into cold rage.

From then on Blackie fought at the top of his power. His head was forward, his eyes intent on Al's. He pressed forward continually, stopping every blow that was aimed at him, solidly connecting with right and left on Al's face or body.

It seemed a matter of only a minute longer. Al began to sway on his feet. Then, without warning, a mass of falling humanity struck Blackie and hurled him back.

Blackie did not fall. It would have been better if he had. He came up with a crash against one of the tables.

It was Harry Joy who fell, but Blackie could hardly see him, for the American sailor's spine had struck against a hard corner. The pain of the accident was nauseating.

Through a mist that obscured his vision, Blackie saw the giant come slowly to his feet. Harry was looking neither to right nor left. He was probably not aware of bumping Blackie. He rushed back between the two men, to close once more with Hard Jack.

Hard Jack was winning! That conviction helped Blackie. He found himself hitting out at Al's face through that inescapable mist. He staggered into a clinch, and hung on. The Britisher pounded the top of his head, but the blows must have had a healing effect, for Blackie's eyes cleared. He wrenched himself loose from the clinch, tottered backward, crouched, and covered his jaw with both hands.

Now came another second's respite. Al surely did not know how badly Blackie was hurt, or he would have rushed and rushed until the end. The American's eyes never left his opponent's. At the same time, however, he was once more vaguely aware of Hard Jack and the big fellow. They were at it, hammer and tongs, over half the veranda.

He was aware, too, of a blur of frightened brown faces—the Javanese bar boys, who marveled at this scene of violence, and enjoyed it hugely; but Blackie was not in-

terested in brown faces. One white face claimed all his attention. He had to lick Al, the limey—he had to!

It was then that Blackie began to show the stuff of heroes. He was sick from the torture of weakness. There seemed to be no life in his legs. He could just stand there and take it, and give what he could.

For five minutes he weathered Al's buffets until the blood flowed from his lips and nostrils. His eyes were puffed. He reeled drunkenly on his feet. No human machine could long endure the punishment the other was inflicting, and Blackie knew it. There was only one thing to do. He summoned all his strength for one last right uppercut.

The blow must have found its mark, for a half foolish look immediately wiped the savagery from Al's face. Blackie saw it for a moment, and felt a joyous inclination to laugh aloud; but now something was happening to him, too. He could see no longer—nothing but pinwheels and explosions of light, and then utter darkness.

VI

A FEW minutes later Blackie came to his senses. All noise had ceased. He gazed stupidly around him, and passed his hand over his forehead. His lips twitched. His head ached dully. This man flat on his face beside him—was Al!

Then memory came with a rush. Blackie forced his eyes to look farther, to see, and they saw six men who had given every ounce that was in them—six men who lay prone, or sat limp on the floor, without power to lift their hands.

Hard Jack Rafferty lay flat on his back. He was partly under a splintered table.

Harry Joy stood erect—no, not erect. He was far from unscathed. He dragged himself painfully along with the aid of the chairs and tables. His back was toward Blackie. He was making for a half full bottle of beer.

Blackie's hand closed around the leg of a shattered chair—the first thing within reach. If it had been a gun, perhaps he would have shot the Britisher. Complete frenzy possessed him. Whatever happened, this must not be! The dirty limejuicer! No limejuicer was going to be last on his feet!

He had licked Hard Jack, had he? All right, but Blackie was still able to speak a piece!

Blackie could not rise, however; so, with his club in his hand, he started crawling across the floor.

"I'll crown him!" he sobbed.

Suddenly a shout of alarm went up from the bar boys, who were already cleaning up the wreckage. There came a heavy scuffling on the gravel walk.

Blackie looked around. Shouting, into the lighted veranda surged the five men of the Haarlemdyk. Blackie's heart leaped up with instant fierce joy. Five fresh men, all hulking fellows—and the big Britisher had had full twenty minutes of the toughest sort of battling!

"*De Engelschman!*" growled a heavy voice.

"*Hy is alleen!*"

"*Nou vent! Nou ploert! Nou hebben wy jou te pakken!*"

Snarling and menacing with their fists, the Hollanders closed in on Harry Joy. Blackie saw a look of fury come over the Britisher's face. He saw the big man try to straighten himself with his back against a table. Let him glare! Let him straighten himself! His strength was surely gone. He could hardly walk. Surely he would never be able to lift his hands!

But he did. Blackie's mind refused to believe what his eyes beheld. Harry Joy's huge arms swung around and beat two of his assailants to the floor.

A feeling of utter dismay swept over the American. Tears of rage and disappointment streamed down his cheeks. Could no force on earth lay that hated limejuicer

low? Could he come victoriously through this final attack?

Then the Britisher went down. Three men flung themselves on top of him; but he continued to fight. His arms and legs thrashed about like flails, but more weakly with every passing second.

Something must have snapped in Blackie's brain. A torrent of curses streamed from his lips. He tried again to rise—and succeeded.

His movements were steady, but his mind was curiously dull. Without understanding exactly why he acted as he did—a sense of fairness had nothing to do with it—he lifted his chair leg and brought it down on a Hollander's head. Then again, and again.

Then Blackie found himself standing in the midst of things, looking down at the limey. He lifted Harry Joy by his collar into a sitting position. More and more he wondered at himself. He stared at the expression of astonishment in the Britisher's eyes. He hated the swaggering bully, yet he had helped him; and now he was clasping Harry Joy's outstretched hand.

"That was decent of you," he heard.

Blackie nodded. At last he understood. The explanation of his extraordinary interference became clear. He offered it with splendid disregard of the outcome of their recent contending.

"That's all right, feller," said he. "Us Americans can lick you limejuicers as much as we've a mind to, but I guess no one else ain't goin' to!"

THE SEA CALLS

STRAIGHT eyes and laughing mouth and wild red hair!

In from the sea, wild like the sea, and strong
With the sea's calm—oh, I have waited long
For your straight eyes, hard mouth, and tossing hair!

In from the sea, wild like the sea, and strong,
You fill me with the love sea lovers know;
I hold you tighter since 'twill not be long
Till the sea calls, and I must let you go.

I have but found you, I can smile at her,
Since for a little I need have no fear;
But in your sleep within my arms you stir!
What did you hear?

Mary Carolyn Davies

Be Curious

A STORY OF NEW YORK LIFE IN THIS RESTLESS AGE

By Elmer Davis

Author of "Times Have Changed," "I'll Show You the Town," etc.

ENID POLLARD, wife of a prosperous mill owner, wearies of her humdrum life in Keatstown, New York, and persuades her husband to let her take a studio in Greenwich Village and study music, while he goes abroad for six months, ostensibly on business. Counseled by Charlie Strawn, a former Keatstown acquaintance, now a "master mind" of the Village, she rents quarters on Minuit Street, described by Joe Carmel, the clever young realtor, as "studio, bedroom, kitchenette, and bath," but actually consisting of one large room with a tiny alcove and closets. Here—at an exorbitant rent—she settles down to become "a real Villager."

Enid makes various acquaintances, including Gilda Cary, her neighbor in the next apartment, a Kansas girl who plays the organ in a movie house, and Angelo Sartoresco, manager of a questionable "cellar dump," the Maroon Mosquito. These and other choice spirits are guests at Mrs. Pollard's house warming party when the present installment of the story opens.

VIII

JOE CARMEL found Enid's party well warmed up. A score of men and women were crowded into her tiny apartment; and though the furniture had been pushed up against the walls, and the rugs rolled up and hung out on the fire escape, the guests were still so congested that dancing was little more than a series of collisions and a succession of apologies. It was easier to sprawl on the furniture, eating sandwiches and cakes and drinking the gin supplied by Charlie Strawn.

For Charlie was host as much as Enid was hostess. His intimate acquaintance with Village feuds had prevented three or four fights, which would certainly have occurred if Enid had invited all the guests she had on her original list. His geniality made everybody feel at home. His flow of conversation kept the party going, mixing up its ingredients all over again as often as it threatened to break up into three or four reciprocally disinterested groups.

As for Enid, she was having the time of her life. Happiness transfigured her plump face, and made it almost beautiful.

Not even happiness could disguise the fact that her figure, chubby when she came to the Village, was even chubbier now. With no need to work, she worked only

when she felt like it. With no husband to make unkind comments on her weight, she didn't exercise. With no need to get up in the morning, she didn't get up.

The chubby figure was slenderized, however, by a five-hundred-dollar evening gown that was making its first appearance; and, after all, nobody who looked at Enid to-night would pay much attention to her figure. The observer's eye was drawn and held by her collar of pearls, and by the diamond and sapphire and emerald bracelets that clustered thick on her arms. Some of the jewels had been imported from Keatstown, and some of them were new, but they were all on duty to-night.

"Oh, this is so delightful, Mr. Carmel! If it hadn't been for you, this party would never have been held."

"How's that?" demanded Joe, for to be told that he was responsible for this riotous hilarity was hardly good news to an Old Ninth Warder.

"Why, you rented me the studio, and it's a perfect duck of a place. I've been happier here than I ever was before!"

"So have I," Charlie Strawn whispered, not so quietly that Joe didn't hear him.

Enid flushed.

"Get Mr. Carmel a cocktail, Charlie. I hope you'll find room to sit down somewhere. Everything's so crowded—"

"Joe can have Sartoresco's place," said Charlie. "He says he's got to go back and see that his cashier doesn't hold out on him at the Maroon Mosquito. Park yourself on the end of the couch, Joe, and I'll bring you some sandwiches."

Nodding to half a dozen guests who were on the couch before him, and saluting others across the room—for as a brisk young business man Joe knew everybody here, and had to pretend to like everybody—he got himself settled and accepted food and drink. Yet he felt a curious uneasiness, which at first he was inclined to set down to the fact that he wasn't a Bohemian, and was out of place here.

Everybody had welcomed him, of course, but it was nothing like the loud welcome bestowed five minutes later on a nervous little man who came in carrying a black leather case that looked as if it might contain a trombone. In a moment, however, Joe realized that this enthusiasm was only natural. There was no trombone in the leather case. There were, instead, three bottles of green Chartreuse.

"And I had the scare of my life," said the newcomer apologetically to Strawn. "There was a cop in front of the house, and he give me the double O so hard that I thought he was sure goin' to take me along with him. Is the stuff all right, Mr. Strawn? Never mind—you can see me to-morrow."

"These bootleggers have no nerve," said Charlie genially to Joe. "I brought up a dozen bottles of gin in a suit case this evening, and nobody bothered me. Of course, I know pretty nearly all the cops in this precinct. By the way, the fellow on this beat now is your old friend Gilfoyle, isn't it? I'll have to get next to him. Don't know him so well as I'd like to."

"You'd better be careful how you try getting next to Marty," Joe advised. "He's a good old dumb-bell—stubborn as a mule and honest as an adding machine."

"Oh, I wasn't trying to corrupt him," said Strawn, laughing, and Joe observed that Charlie had had just a little more gin than he could well carry. "Wouldn't corrupt a patrolman, Joe—not me! When you want to do anything like that, you start with the man higher up. Don't have to teach your Uncle Charlie how to suck eggs!"

"I suppose you heard that the Graniano has been padlocked?"

"Sure," said Strawn. "Why not?"

They were a lot of boobs. They got on the wrong side of people that could do 'em harm, and didn't have sense enough to cover themselves up. I know! The reform association's after Sartoresco now. It's after all the cellar dumps; but how can you get 'em? They don't sell hooch. Why should they? Let the customers bring their own, and you can make just as much selling them ginger ale at a dollar a bottle. That's the way it's done; and clean up—Lord! Say, Joe, do you know the Maroon Mosquito is cleaning up a thousand a month?"

"No," said Joe. "I don't know it, and I don't believe it."

He felt almost blasphemous in daring to contradict the all-wise Strawn, but this was incredible.

"S a fact," Strawn declared, wagging his head and reaching back for another cocktail. "'S a fact, Joe. Tell you how I know, if you don't let it go any further." He looked around cautiously, but all the other guests were busily chattering to one another. "Tell you how I know—I own it. Sartoresco's only a dummy."

"The devil you say!"

"Yes, sir! That's not the only one, either. I own some more."

Joe looked at him in amazement.

"Well, Charlie, I've often wondered what business you were in, but I knew you were a master mind."

"I certainly am," said Strawn. "The master mind of the cellar dumps—not all of them, but the brightest and jazziest. Pretty good, eh? There aren't many things about the Village you didn't know, Joe Carmel, but that's one of them. And, Lord, how the money rolls in! I'd tell you how much I've made in the last six months, but you wouldn't believe me."

Strawn didn't think it necessary to add that the money had rolled out, through certain bucket shops, almost as fast as it had rolled in.

"You wouldn't believe me," he repeated; "but there's better times ahead. Unless this reform association gets somebody up high to listen to their yowls, I'll clean up fifty thousand in the next year. There's money in this game, Joe!"

"Yes—there seems to be," replied Joe nervously.

Fifty thousand! Joe Carmel had made less than six thousand last year, and that was the best year he had ever had. He

lived inexpensively and saved a good deal. He had three thousand dollars in the bank, and a five-thousand-dollar equity in a remodeled apartment house on St. Luke's Place; but this was only chicken feed to Strawn's income.

"Real money," Strawn repeated. "Joe, you aren't going to work for Poggio & Bracciolini forever, are you?"

"Why, I suppose not. I'd thought of getting out for myself—when I had a little more capital."

"In real estate?"

"Sure. I like it, and it's all I know."

"You know the Village better than any other man in it," said Strawn, "except maybe Frank Poggio—business and politics both. I suppose you know pretty nearly every voter in the district by name, don't you?"

"Just about—the men, at any rate."

"You speak Italian, and all. They tell me you're likely to be the next district leader when Horgan passes on, and from what I hear about his liver that won't be very long."

Joe was startled. He had supposed that very few people, and nobody outside the organization, knew what was really the matter with Horgan.

"You can't always tell about these things, Charlie. A district leader is a pretty big man. Some of the boys think I'd be a good one if anything happened to Horgan, but you can't tell."

"When you're leader," said Strawn, "you won't have to worry about capital for your own real estate business; but that may be a long time yet. Horgan might hang on. You're a good investor, and you save your money. Even without a political drag you'll be a rich man when you're sixty; but you won't be sixty for thirty years. Hell, Joe! You want to be rich now."

Joe didn't say anything. He didn't seem to need to.

"You're not a Bohemian," said Strawn. "You're a young fellow, and likely you'll be getting married some of these days. No use working hard all your life, so your children can be rich. Make it early, and get the fun out of it yourself; but you'll never get rich working for somebody else—not even for Poggio!"

"Well?" said Joe. "Spill it!"

"I need a partner, Joe. I'm not a practical real estate man—not so much as I

need to be, with all these café interests. I need a partner who knows the game."

"No, you don't," said Joe easily. "You need something else. If you want me to come in, you'd better tell me what it is."

Strawn laughed.

"I might have known you were wise! Well, Joe, there are mighty few people—not over four or five—who know that I'm interested in the cellar dumps; but unfortunately one or two of them are very far from being friends of mine. I'm just beginning to make real money, and you know how your old acquaintances begin to get sore when you lift yourself ahead of them. With the reform association beginning a campaign against the cellar dumps, I figure that a partner who stands well with the organization would be worth—"

He paused.

"Yes?" said Joe.

"An even split of the profits."

Joe's subconsciousness told him that a man who made such an offer needed help badly; but he couldn't stop to reflect on that. An even split of fifty thousand—twenty-five thousand for Joe Carmel—four times as much as he could make out of his job with Poggio!

"But, Charlie," he said reluctantly, "these cellar dumps are bad business. I don't like them."

Strawn's bland urbanity made Joe feel like a schoolboy.

"My dear fellow, I know you've joined the reform association, but I didn't dream you'd done it seriously!"

"I didn't. I think some of those people are nuts. I wanted to see what they were up to—help out in their playground program, and things like that, that everybody would agree on—"

"Even I," said Charlie; "but they don't stop with playgrounds. What's the matter with the cellar dumps? They don't violate the law—at least, my places don't. Not a drop of liquor sold in any one of them. If a waiter tries it on his own hook, he's fired. If people want to bring their own, that's another matter; but we play it safe."

"But they're bad places, Charlie. People hanging around half shot till four in the morning—"

"Since when have you become so puritanical?" asked Strawn.

"Since I've seen boys and girls flocking into these places," said Joe fiercely, "when they ought to be home and in bed—kids in

their teens. That's a new thing in the Village. People that are old enough to know what they're doing can be as Bohemian as they like; but kids—"

"Joe," Strawn interrupted, "you've been a kid in New York. Where is there to go? Did you stay at home every night when you were sixteen?"

"Of course not; but I wasn't a girl."

"Oho! So sauce for the goose isn't sauce for the gander! All right for you to breeze around the streets in the evening in search of information, but all wrong for girls, eh? Joe, the world moves. The girls are no more content to stay at home than you used to be. Why shouldn't they go out to a quiet little café where no liquor is sold, where they can listen to music, perhaps dance a little with boys they know—"

"Or pick up."

"Don't they ever pick up anybody in the daytime? You know and I know that girls who want company can always find it. Why don't you worry about the perils of girlhood in offices, in shops, even in the schools? Why do you begin to worry only when they come down to the Village for a little clean amusement?"

Joe shook his head. It did seem hard to explain, now that he thought it over.

"Really," said Strawn, "I never expected these quaint old ideas from a Villager."

"I'm not a Villager—I'm an Old Ninth Warder."

"Call it what you like, but it's mighty queer that you think a girl is worse off in a cellar café in the Village, dancing with a boy she's known for years, than off at a movie somewhere picking up nobody knows who! Heavens, Joe, I'm not a monster. I have my faults, like everybody, but I'm not in the business of laying traps for innocence. These Village cafés meet a natural need of life in New York. They're virtually clubs where young people can meet, spend a pleasant evening, and get a little wholesome amusement—music and dancing and light refreshments. If they weren't there, they'd be out on the streets, getting into all sorts of trouble. Home? You know they wouldn't stay at home. Why, the city ought to maintain these places at public expense as a public utility—a legitimate form of social service. No, Joe, your conscience would be clear if you went in with me."

Joe thought it over. He felt uncomfortable—partly because he couldn't square

this plausible reasoning with his intuitive conviction that the cellar dumps were bad; partly because he had been uncomfortable ever since he came to the party. It wasn't the heat, it wasn't the crowd. Half a dozen guests had drifted away, and there was plenty of room for the survivors. When the door opened to admit the last guest—Gilda Cary, in a homemade evening gown of blue—he knew why he had been uncomfortable. He had been lonesome.

"I'll think it over, Charlie, and let you know later. Gilda, you haven't sworn off dancing with me, have you?"

Charlie Strawn looked at them with a contented smile. A young man whose eyes held that expression when he went to meet his girl—for, Gilda not being given to promiscuous confidences, neither Enid nor Charlie knew of the frost that had descended on her affair with Joe—would probably be hospitable to a proposal that he should change his line of business and quadruple his income.

IX

THERE were a number of things Gilda Cary had wanted, when she came in, more than to dance with Joe—above all, something to eat; but he had swept her into his arms without asking her. Gilda discovered that she liked being swept into Joe's arms without being asked. Within two minutes she discovered that she liked dancing with him more than ever; and since he felt the same way about dancing with her, neither of them was of much use to the party after that.

They did their social duty, of course. After a pause for supper Joe danced with Enid and Gilda danced with Charlie Strawn; but after that the two spent all their time dancing together. Nobody paid much attention to their absorption in each other, for by that time the party had dissolved into a collection of couples similarly absorbed; so they drifted on in a comfortable sense of complete detachment from all the universe except the piano and the phonograph which alternately provided dance music.

It was so pleasant, Gilda thought, to spend all their time together, dancing in silence with a sensuous perfection so complete that it didn't seem personal—pleasant to be together without having had to go through the tiresome formality of making up their quarrel. As for Joe, he was too

contented even to wonder why they got along perfectly whenever they didn't try to talk to each other.

One by one the couples took their leave, going up to make their farewells at the couch where Enid sat beside Charlie. These two had been sitting there a long time, in absorbed conversation varied by understanding silences. At least, Charlie reflected, he understood her; and while she would probably never understand him, that was all the better. He must find out how that Paris divorce was getting along.

He had never made love to her, for unpleasant memories of the hard reputation of Henry Pollard made it seem safer to wait till she was free. He hadn't even thought of making love to her, when she first came to the Village. It had merely amused him to supervise the beginnings of her career as a Villager; to use his tact and knowledge to save her from unpleasant blunders, to watch the gradual dropping off of the ways of Keatstown.

Charlie Strawn hated his home town, and Henry Pollard was an embodiment of everything that he hated in it. By making Enid over into a person who would never be contented in Keatstown again, he had done what he could to get even with his former neighbors.

But that stage was long past now. He was interested in Enid for herself. She still had unexpected and surprising intervals of ignorance and innocence, but slowly and painstakingly he had been educating her in the literature and conversation and habits of thought that prevailed in the Village. He had made her a woman of the world, and in the process he had come very near to falling in love with her.

Not quite, of course. She was a nice little thing, but too simple. After all, however, you didn't need to be wildly in love with a woman to marry her. Enid as he had remodeled her would be about the sort of wife he wanted—handsome, well dressed, good-natured, a good entertainer, and too stupid to know what he might be doing when he was away from home.

And there was another item. As he watched her, going to the door to bid farewell to specially honored guests, the glitter of those jewels burned his eyes—red and green and blue stones, and diamonds that sparkled with all the colors of the spectrum. When the Pollards got their discreet divorce, the diamonds would go with Enid.

The alimony, of course, would stop whenever she remarried. Pollard might be parsimonious and refuse to settle any money on her; but the diamonds were hers. Certain passages in Mr. Strawn's history, now buried in the dark past, had taught him that jewels were the most portable form of ready money.

He was making money now, of course—big money; but most of it was going to cover his margins. He would make bigger money next year, if all went well; but with big profits behind him, and bigger profits ahead, he always found himself pressed for money in any large sums at the moment. That disease is common in New York. He would be saved a good deal of embarrassment if those jewels were always within his reach.

Two by two the guests had vanished until finally nobody was left but Joe and Gilda, dancing on till the phonograph died out in erratic squawks. Startled as if just awakening from sleep, Gilda looked at her wrist watch.

"Why, it's three o'clock, and everybody's gone! Come on, Joe!"

"Now don't you go," said Enid. "You and Joe and Charlie stay here, and we'll have another drink and finish the pastry."

"I'll have a piece of pastry," said Gilda, "but no drink. It would keep me awake."

"My dear Gilda," said Strawn gravely, "I'd make any sacrifice to keep you from staying awake, even to drinking your cocktail myself."

"You've had enough, Charlie." Gilda said it in no mood of puritanical reproach, but merely as a statement of fact; for, being a Villager, she regarded facts as something that should be stated. "Besides, we'd all better turn in and help Enid clean things up."

"Oh, don't bother about that now," Enid protested. "Leave it till to-morrow."

Gilda looked about her. She saw crumbly plates and sticky glasses everywhere; little pools of ashes and cigarette stubs on the window seats, on the table, beside each chair; damp spots on the parquet floor, where drinks had been spilled.

Enid, who had kept house in Keatstown only in the sense of giving the necessary minimum of orders to the servants, could leave it till morning; but Gilda, back in Kansas, had kept house with her own broom and mop and vacuum cleaner. She couldn't be comfortable in the midst of all

this litter. If she stayed here, her conscience would make her start cleaning up; and as Enid obviously didn't intend to clean up to-night, that would be unkind.

So Gilda manufactured a yawn.

"Maybe you're right. I guess I'll say good night now. I'm tired out. Thump on the wall when you get up, and I'll come over and help you with the dishes."

Enid and Charlie protested, but visibly as a matter of form.

Joe said good night, too, surprised to find that he was trembling. For in a moment he would be out in the hallway with Gilda; they would have to talk, if only to the extent of telling each other good night; and if they once began to talk, they would probably quarrel.

He had to go somewhere, however; so he escaped from Enid and Charlie and followed Gilda out into the hallway, to find her with her hand on the door knob.

"Do you have to go in now?" he asked with stammering diffidence.

"Where else is there to go?" she inquired practically. "All those dirty dishes were driving me crazy."

"We might go out somewhere," he suggested wildly. "To—to the Maroon Mosquito—"

"Joe, are you crazy? Why in the world should we go to the Maroon Mosquito? If you want to talk to me, come in."

"But it's three o'clock in the morning."

"Don't be a goat! What difference does that make, in the Village?"

Well, what difference did it make? Joe knew it was all right, and Gilda knew it was all right, and nobody else would know about it at all except Enid and Charlie, who were friends of Gilda's, and in no position to cast censorious stones themselves. To Joe's friends of the Old Ninth Ward, however, it wouldn't look all right.

This was the second time to-night that Joe's inborn convictions had had to bow before plausible reasoning, and he was disturbed. Something was wrong somewhere, and it was frightful to think that it might be his convictions. Nevertheless, he followed Gilda into her apartment and sat down on the one comfortable chair. Her simply furnished single room seemed bare after Enid's splendor, but it looked like home to Joe.

"This is the first time you've been in here for weeks," she said reproachfully.

"I've wanted to come, but—"

"I know," she said contritely. "I've been kind of mean to you. When I don't see you, I think about you a lot—about you, not your principles; but when I see you, I have to see your principles, too, and your principles and my principles just won't mix."

"Then let's not think about them," he proposed.

"Not this evening," she agreed. "Tell me what you've been doing since I saw you last."

"Still working for Poggio & Bracciolini; but I'm thinking of making a change."

"Going out for yourself?" she asked with alert interest. "I'm awfully glad! Everybody likes Frank Poggio, but you'd rather be your own boss."

"I'd have a partner, if I took up this new proposition. It's still real estate, in a way, but from another angle. I'd tell you if we had it settled, but so long as it's still up in the air—"

Gilda frowned. She wanted to know all about it now; but it had never been settled that Joe's business was her business too.

"And what have you been doing?" he demanded.

"Still playing the organ."

"Are you just going to keep on doing that all the time, Gilda? It doesn't get you anywhere."

"Why should I get anywhere? I've got to the Village—isn't that far enough? I have lots of friends and lots of fun—"

He groaned. They were getting back to principles.

"But, Joe, it isn't as if I had any artistic talent—even as much as Enid. What else could I do?"

"What else could you do? Gilda, there's a house on the market down on King Street—nice little Colonial house, red brick, fluted pillars and fanlight at the front door—two stories and attic and basement, eight rooms and two baths. They're holding it for fourteen thousand, but I could get it for twelve. It would cost about four thousand more to do it over right, but ten thousand, anyway, could remain on mortgage. There's a back yard with southern exposure and lots of sun—"

Her eyes were laughing at him.

"Do you want me to buy it and keep a boarding house?"

"Gilda! You know what I want. We've never got this far before, because we always get to talking about our princi-

ples and get in a row, but honestly I'm so crazy about you that—"

He had her hands. He almost had Gilda, for she was trembling as violently as he; but she had presence of mind enough to interrupt.

"That you'd live in a studio apartment with me?"

He shook his head.

"I'm not a Villager."

"And—and I am, Joe. Oh, it wouldn't make any difference where we lived—on King Street or right here. We look at everything so differently, we'd be fighting all the time. Now wouldn't we?"

"We wouldn't fight at all," he declared, so angrily that she couldn't help laughing. He let go her hands. "Oh, but Gilda!"

A pause. "We never got this far before, because our principles got in the way; but I love you and I want you to marry me—"

"Principles and all?"

"Well, when one's married, one makes adjustments of those things."

"Sometimes."

"Don't you love me, Gilda?"

She was pondering, her brows knit.

"What? Oh, yes, of course I love you; but just the same we'd drive each other crazy, and I don't believe in getting married unless you mean to stay with it, and have a fair chance to stay with it."

This was a sentiment that even an Old Ninth Warder could approve, but Joe was too much upset to take it in.

"But if we love each other—" he began, reaching out his arms for her.

She backed away.

"Don't touch me, Joe, or I'd be foolish."

"Sensible, you mean!"

"No, foolish. Oh, you're Italian, and you take your emotions hard; but I come from Kansas, where we take our principles hard."

"We'd be a pretty good combination," he suggested. "The melting pot, you know, and so on."

"Yes, if we combined; but if we tried to combine our principles, the old melting pot would be cracked in two."

"You're as stubborn," he said angrily, "as—as Marty Gilfoyle. You've got these crazy Village ideas. It isn't right for a girl like you to be running around with this wild crowd—"

"Such as you, I suppose. You'd better go home, Joe, before we start throwing the furniture at each other. Be thankful we're

not going to throw the nice new furniture you'd buy for that house on King Street!"

He went out, and stood for an instant in the corridor. The sullen anger that had flamed up in him was being quenched with amazing speed, blanketed by another emotion. He was hurt, almost frightened. Unconsciously he had been convinced that now at last he would find Gilda contrite and pliable, and that she would come to reason. For months he had been telling himself after every quarrel that she would come to reason; but she hadn't come to reason, and now he had come to care for her so much that the future was positively unthinkable without her.

Of course, without Gilda Cary, there would still be life; there would be business and politics. Joe would become district leader, and rise even higher, perhaps. He would make money; and of course, if he wanted to make money, to roll in wealth and try to forget about Gilda, the thing to do was to go in with Strawn. If it had been anything but the cellar dumps!

Realizing suddenly that the hallway outside Gilda's door was no place for a reverie, he started on. In five steps, passing Enid's door, he swerved aside as it was flung open and Charlie Strawn came out.

Strawn jumped nervously. Obviously he hadn't expected to see Joe; but in an instant he had recovered.

"We're pretty late, both of us, aren't we? But who cares? After all, this is Greenwich Village."

Joe's jaw set. A moment earlier he had been ready to accept Strawn's offer, but this remark carried an innuendo he didn't like.

"Is it?" he asked coldly. "Well, for me, it's the Old Ninth Ward."

X

WHICH, in fact, it was; as was proved by certain events which had just taken place in Enid's apartment.

Joe and Gilda, departing, had left Charlie and Enid still seated side by side. His arm lay along the back of the couch, and when they were alone she discovered that he was softly patting her shoulder. Perhaps because she didn't like this, perhaps because Gilda's horror at the disorder in the apartment had stirred her conscience, she rose suddenly.

"This place does look scandalous," she observed. "I'm going to rinse the dishes and stack them in the sink."

"Not to-night," Strawn protested.

"Why not to-night?"

He shrugged his shoulders. The girl was thicker than he had thought. A gentleman who feels like pouring out the fullness of his bursting heart must naturally be a little discouraged when he discovers that the lady in question would rather wash dishes—especially if he must help her.

"If I don't make a start to-night, there'll be an awful lot to do to-morrow," said Enid.

"You ought to have a maid."

"It would be hard to find one that kept Village hours. There's no room for a maid here, and if I got one who slept out she'd always wake me up in the morning. Besides, I want to reduce. Come on, Charlie! Put on the other apron, and we'll clean things up."

He ought to have been cheered by this domestic touch, but he wasn't. He let her strap him in an apron, and then watched her strip off her rings and bracelets and dump them in a heap on the library table. The clank of heavy clusters of jewels was startling in the nocturnal stillness. Strawn was suddenly sobered.

"Are you going to leave these here?" he asked.

"No place to put them in the kitchenette. The table's full, and I can't put them in the sink, to get wet and greasy."

"But when you're in the kitchenette," he objected, "you can't see this table out here. Anybody might come in from the fire escape and slide out with the lot. We'd never see him, and, with the dishes clattering, we'd never hear him."

"Oh, pooh! No burglars around here. Lock the fire escape window, if you're worried. Better lock the door, too. I never do till I go to bed. Gilda Cary's always running in."

He locked the door and the window and came back slowly, finding it hard to take his eyes off that flashing heap of many-colored gems. Even without the pearl necklace, which she still wore, there was more money on that table than his cellar dumps would make in a year.

"Oh, don't worry," said Enid. "They're all insured. Come on! Let's clean up this mess. I'd certainly hate to have Henry walk in and see it."

Charlie Strawn stopped. If he hadn't had a dozen cocktails that evening, he might have submitted to dishwashing as one

of those grotesque ordeals which the true knight must endure to win his lady; but the cocktails had magnified his ego and unsettled his judgment. Had he left Keatstown, and become a personage in Greenwich Village, to put on an apron and wash dishes? Above all, to wash Enid's dishes because Henry didn't like to have the house left cluttered up?

No! This was too much. Besides—

"Henry?" he said. "Henry won't walk in, will he? How is that Paris divorce coming on?"

"Paris divorce!" she gasped. "Charlie! Is—is Henry trying to divorce me? Oh, the scoundrel!"

If Charlie hadn't had so much to drink, he might have seized an advantage there, but he was too fuddled to take in more than the primary fact—that the Paris divorce seemed to be news to Enid.

"Why, what else did he go to Europe for? I know that story of a business trip was the bunk."

"He went because we both needed a rest."

"Well, a Paris divorce would give you a good one—with no fuss and no scandal."

"Why, Charlie, we never thought of such a thing! I—I love my husband."

He shrugged impatiently. Why stick to these ritual declarations?

"Of course," he conceded; "but you fight like cats and dogs. Everybody in Keatstown knows it, and everybody in Keatstown says that's why he's gone abroad."

"Why, the mean things! I—I'll never go back to that town again!"

This was more like it.

"Of course you won't. You and I have got beyond Keatstown, Enid. Let Henry get his Paris divorce—or you move over into Jersey, and divorce him for cruelty, if you want to; and then—"

"And then?" said Enid in horror. "There just wouldn't be any then. I love my husband."

"Say, listen!" said Charlie, in exasperation. "You don't need to pull that stuff with me. I know better. I've said nothing so far, because I thought it would be better to wait till you were absolutely free; but you know I simply couldn't live without you. Let him get his divorce, and then you and I—"

She was backing away from him, with a scared face.

"You and I?" she muttered. "Charlie, are you crazy?"

"Crazy about you, that's all—since the first day I saw you, when you got me to persuade Henry to let you live in the Village." She backed against the wall, and he advanced with more confidence. "I knew then we'd never be complete without each other."

She shrank away as he laid his hands lightly on her shoulders.

"Now you stop!" she said, in a squeaky little voice.

The tone, rather than the words, brought Mr. Strawn back to complete sobriety. It was the tone of a petulant, pampered child. The illusions of the last three months went down with a crash. That was just what she was, he reflected—a petulant, pampered child who had picked up the ideas and language of the Village, as she would have picked up the patter of any set she was thrown with, by mere childish imitation. No fit mate for Mr. Strawn!

"Well, for God's sake!" he groaned. "Do you mean to tell me you didn't see this all along?"

"Why, Charlie! I thought you were just a good pal."

Charlie swallowed another groan. He had lost his enthusiasm for this enterprise, but he had to carry it through for the sake of his technical pride.

"That was what I wanted to be, dearest girl; but no man could be with you so constantly as I've been without falling madly in love with—"

"Now, Charlie!" she interrupted. "I've told you Henry isn't going to get a Paris divorce; so you mustn't talk that way to me. You must think I'm a bad woman!"

Mr. Strawn shivered. His conquests, in recent years, had been in the Village, where one had got beyond such elementary arguments. He was as much at a loss as a machine gunner suddenly assaulted from the rear by a man with an ax.

"Well, my God, I only wanted to marry you!" he cried in exasperation. "There's no crime in that, is there?"

"I'm married already," said Enid solemnly. "I believe that marriage is a sacred thing."

"Good Lord! And I helped you find your way around in the Village!"

"I am a broad-minded woman," said Enid. "I know that some of my friends here are not as strong on the sacredness of

marriage as I am. That isn't any business of mine. Let them have their own ideals, but as for me—"

For some minutes past Charlie had felt that this was impossible. Now he knew it was impossible.

"But you let me introduce you to everybody!" he cried. "You let me show you all around and give you the inside of everything that's going on in the Village! A good pal! Yes, I guess I have been a good pal. You know everybody and everything, and now you try to dump me!"

"I'm not trying to dump you—not any such thing. You've been a good friend, and I'd like to keep you—as a friend; but if you ever say anything more about my divorcing Henry, or his divorcing me, that will be the end of our friendship. I'd miss you, Charlie, but I could do without you."

Curiously, this remark cheered Mr. Strawn. He had been played for a sucker all the way through. She could do without him now. She had learned all that she wanted him to teach her. She had made her own place in the Village. She had got everything out of him that she wanted; and then, when it came to something that he wanted, she reminded him that she could do without him.

Charlie cursed himself for having so terribly misjudged her, but at least it relieved his pride to find that he hadn't been played for a sucker by a petulant, pampered child. What had he told Pollard?

"This is woman's age. They wind us all around their fingers. The modern woman is wise—she was born with it."

She certainly was!

"Well," he remarked cheerlessly, as he reached back and untied his apron, "if you feel that way about me, you probably won't want me to help you wash dishes."

"Now, Charlie, I hope this won't interrupt our friendship."

So, he reflected, there were still things she wanted to get out of him! Well, experience had taught him that it never paid to lose friends, even mercenary friends. If he couldn't marry Enid, he might still be able to square himself some way.

And again his eyes were drawn irresistibly to the flashing heap of jewels.

"No, dear girl," he said, with recovered irony. "I respect your principles, now that I understand them. It won't interrupt our friendship. You won't make me stop coming to see you, I hope?"

"Of course you can come to see me, only you mustn't think I'm a bad woman just because I'm a Villager."

It was certainly the Old Ninth Ward, mused Mr. Strawn, as he went downstairs with Joe Carmel.

XI

THE two went downstairs quietly, through some ancient instinct that had survived the Village tradition of freedom and late hours; and at the turn of the steps they came upon a man who was slinking upstairs still more quietly. The sudden encounter startled both of them. They peered into the man's face, but he seemed interested only in getting past them. They paused while he went on past Enid's door, and Gilda's, and mounted the stair toward the top floor.

"Who the devil's that?" said Strawn softly. "I believe he was hiding out on the landing. Think it's a burglar?"

"No, that's only the tenant of the top floor back—the apartment over Mrs. Polard. He's a fellow named Herman—moved in about a week ago."

"Oh!" said Strawn. He didn't know the name, but he knew the face, and the man. He had once known them very well, and the knowledge promised to be useful. "I've heard of him. Plays the clarinet, doesn't he?"

"That's the man—toddles around all day and half the night."

"I guess he's harmless," said Strawn, as they opened the street door and came out on the stoop. "Hello! What's this?"

Across the street a patrol wagon was backed up in front of the steps that led down to the Maroon Mosquito, and down the block could be heard the clanging gong of a disappearing ambulance.

"What the devil?" said Strawn brusquely, and ran down the steps.

As he reached the sidewalk the patrol wagon, too, drove away. A group of loafers—for even on the deserted streets of nocturnal New York under prohibition there are still loafers who can be assembled by the simultaneous appearance of an ambulance and a patrol wagon—broke up slowly, and Strawn seized one of its members.

"What happened?" he demanded. "Did they pull the Maroon Mosquito? Was there a shooting?"

"No, but a girl comes out of there all soused to the gills, see?—a kid of sixteen

or thereabouts, from her looks. When she gets to the top of the steps, she lets out a squeal and says she's blind. Wood alcohol, I guess—that's what the doc in the ambulance figured it, anyway; so they take her off to Bellevue."

"What was the wagon for?"

"Oh, the cop on the beat—this fellow Gilfoyle—goes down into the Maroon Mosquito and tells Sartoresco he'll have to come along to the station. Sartoresco tells him he didn't sell the girl this stuff, and one thing led to another, and it looks as if he won't go peaceably; so Gilfoyle sends for the wagon, and asks him if he'd rather ride settin' up or feet first. He's a fresh guy, that rookie cop!"

"Too fresh," said Strawn thoughtfully, as he turned away.

"It couldn't have been Marty," Joe insisted. "He was on duty before midnight."

"They're short-handed over at the house—lots of the patrolmen have to do extra work just now. This fellow seemed to know him."

"Sure I know him!" added the lounge.

"It was Gilfoyle."

"Exactly," said Charlie. "I told you, Joe, this friend of yours would get into trouble."

"Looks to me as if it's Sartoresco that's in trouble."

"Joe"—Strawn looked around cautiously, but the loafer was out of hearing—"Joe, I tell you we don't sell anything in any of my places. If this girl drank wood alcohol, she brought it in with her, or got it from some fellow she picked up. I'm going to see about Sartoresco's bail, and to-morrow he'll be discharged, and your rookie friend will be up for oppression and assault."

"Go easy on Marty. He's a well-meaning old dumb-bell."

"He ought to be driving a truck, however," said Strawn severely. "I can't afford to go easy on him. This is bad business, pulling one of my cafés because some fool girl doesn't take the trouble to be sure what she's drinking. It will certainly be meat for the reform association that's trying to bust everything open, unless we stop it right away. I've got to get Sartoresco off. That won't be hard, for apparently there's nothing on him but a little back talk; and then I've got to break this cop, by way of example."

"Break him?" said Joe. "Say, now—"

"I can't have him interfering with my business—which will be our business, if you say the word."

"I haven't made up my mind about that yet, Charlie. If you break Marty, it will never be our business. He's dumb, but he's a good guy. Also, Charlie, you may find it won't be so easy to break him as you think. He's a friend of mine."

"Yes?" said Strawn, and now there was nothing genial about the light in his eyes. "But Horgan isn't dead yet, and you're not district leader, Joe. You're not the only man in the organization. I have other friends. Now don't get steamed up about this crazy cop. I've got nothing against him. In fact, I'll be doing him a favor by getting him broke now. He doesn't belong on the force, and the longer he stays the harder he'll fall; for he'll certainly fall with a loud crash some day if he keeps on like this. No, Joe, I'm sorry for Gilfoyle, but he's got to be shown. These sourfaces won't rest till they've made the Village over into a Chautauqua. Let them go after violations of the law, but when they hop on a place that doesn't violate the law—and the Maroon Mosquito doesn't—it's time to stop."

Joe Carmel made no reply to this.

"Friendship is all right, Joe," continued Strawn, "but it shouldn't interfere with business. Sentiment's a fine thing, but you've got to be wise. You know this fellow has pulled a boner, and he doesn't belong on the force. For my sake—and yours, too—I've got to break him. Tell you what I'll do—you do what you can for him, if you want to, and I'll do what I can against him. If you win, there'll be no more cellar dumps, and the reformers will run the Village; for if one cop can get away with this, they all can. If I win, I'll hold no malice. My offer to you is still open, and after that we work together instead of against each other; but I've got to get your friend Gilfoyle out of the way first. He's much too curious to stay here in the Village!"

XII

JOE set off westward, toward the rooming house where he maintained the most economical of bachelor quarters. He ought to have been thinking about the perilous prospects of Marty Gilfoyle, about the impending ruin of the Village and the restoration of the Old Ninth Ward, about his own

prospects as a potential partner of Charlie Strawn; but he didn't think about these things at all.

He couldn't think about anything but Gilda Cary. She had said that she loved him, but she couldn't love his principles. Those principles were costing him a good deal. He couldn't love Gilda's principles, but it would do no harm to go over his own principles, examine them a little more carefully, and see if they were really worth the price—

Mr. Strawn, however, wasted no thoughts on Enid. He had more urgent business. First he stepped into an all-night drug store, called the all-night office of a surety company, and arranged for Sartoresco's bail. Then, very cautiously, he slipped back to the house on Minuit Street.

The outer door, he knew, was never locked. He slipped inside, closed it softly, and tiptoed still more softly up the stairs. Past Enid's door, past Gilda's door, up another flight—he paused before the door of the top floor back and knocked softly—tap, tap—pause—tap—pause—tap, tap.

A squeak of bed springs, the soft thump of bare feet on the floor, and the door was flung open by a drowsy man in untidy pyjamas, who rubbed his eyes, stared, then swore suddenly and tried to shut the door again; but he was too late. Strawn's foot and shoulder were in the way.

"Now don't be inhospitable, Larrabee," said Charlie softly. "I beg your pardon—the name's Herman now, isn't it? But you still remember the old knock."

Sullenly Larrabee stood aside while Strawn came in, shut the door, sat down, and lit a cigarette.

"Well?" he asked, between smoke rings. "Don't look so sad about it. Always fair weather when old friends get together!"

"What do you want?"

Strawn chuckled.

"A little chat about the dear old times. You haven't changed a bit, Larrabee—not even your habits. Still furtive—hiding on the stairs. I'll have to tell Mrs. Pollard and Miss Cary to be sure to lock their doors, with you about."

Larrabee glowered at him.

"Cheer up!" said Strawn. "What the devil? We made enough money for each other in times past to keep us friends for life. Of course, when we were doing so well, it was a bit careless of you to go out

for more in your own office; but things were run so loosely in the prohibition enforcement bureau in those days that I don't blame you for thinking you could get away with it—as you did."

"What do you want?" Larrabee snarled again.

"I?" said Strawn politely. "I don't want anything but a friendly chat. What are you doing these days, besides playing the clarinet?"

"None of your business."

"Oh, don't say that, Larrabee! Don't say that! I'm in and out of this house a good deal. Some of the residents are my friends. I have a right to be curious about their neighbors. Anyway, Larrabee, why the grouch? We used to be friends."

"We used to be."

"I hope we are still," said Strawn genially. "No reason why we should be enemies, only I've got to know what you were doing, hiding out on the stairs. Mrs. Pollard is also a friend of mine."

"Yes, I guess she is," said Larrabee sardonically.

"Ah!" Mr. Strawn became thoughtful.

"You know that, eh? Come clean, Larrabee. What's the game?"

Larrabee was silent.

"Spill it," said Strawn. "If I find a man who to my knowledge has committed grand larceny hiding out in the hallway outside the studio of a friend of mine, I might feel that I ought to protect the more recent friend by turning up the older friend."

"You won't turn me up."

"I don't want to. I want to renew the happy association of old times. Only, what's the game?"

"You won't turn me up. You've got no more on me than I've got on you."

"Why, Larrabee, you surprise me! You've got nothing on me. You stole the blanks from the enforcement bureau and forged the withdrawal permits, but you can't swear that I ever got a single case of the stuff from the warehouses. You never saw me get it. My name isn't down on paper anywhere, in my own handwriting. The people we dealt with would stick to me, rather than to you, if we happened to be found on opposite sides—as I hope we won't. Besides, the withdrawal permits are the smallest part of it. Everybody was faking them in those days; but that eighteen hundred you got out of the safe—"

Larrabee's hand was slowly sliding up the mattress toward his pillow. It was almost there when Strawn's hand came out of his coat pocket, gripping a gun.

"Sit still!" he advised. "I said we ought to be friends. Sit still, and I'll tell you why. I'm not the only one that knows about that eighteen hundred, but I'm the only one that saw you take it. I happen to know there's enough in the district attorney's office now to indict you, if anybody turned you up. No, indictment isn't conviction, but if I appeared as a witness for the prosecution it would be; so we might as well be friends."

Larrabee was still silent.

"Why not?" Strawn asked thoughtfully.

"There must be some reason. Well, you'd better spill it quick, for in thirty seconds more I'm going to that telephone."

"To call up your friend Mrs. Pollard?"

"Ah!" said Charlie. "So that's what you're doing?"

Larrabee nodded.

"Oho!" Strawn laughed softly. "Nothing in the story of the Paris divorce, but he hops off to Paris and sets detectives on his wife to get a New York divorce! That's so—they've been making it harder in Paris lately. So the jealous husband is on the trail, eh?"

"I guess so," Larrabee conceded. "Oh, you've got me, Charlie. I'm working for the Carthew Agency, see? I s'pose it's the husband. Anyway, the stall is that I'm here to guard the jewels, only she mustn't know anything about it, because she's touchy, and don't like to have anybody think she needs a bodyguard. That's the dope, as it came to Carthew, and as he passed it on to me; but of course I could see that that was all apple sauce. So could Carthew, I guess. How the hell can I keep anybody from stealing her jewels when she's out—or when she's in, either, so long as she don't know who I am, and would give me the fish face if she did? Anyway, they told me to keep an eye on her, and I do."

"Well, you haven't seen much," said Charlie morosely.

"I saw her give you the ice a while ago," Larrabee told him, with a grin. "I saw it from the fire escape. The cop on the beat was pullin' a café on the corner, so I climbed around pretty much where I pleased. She don't like you much, Charlie. You used to have better luck."

"So I did," said Mr. Strawn, with rem-
iniscent melancholy. "I'm glad we're back
on a friendly footing, so that you feel like
recalling old times; but you haven't got
anything on me—or her."

"Not yet. What you goin' to do,
Charlie? I can't get myself called off. And
you wouldn't—"

"I wouldn't get you fired if I could help
it," said Strawn. "Of course, Carthew has
to be particular about the character of his
operatives, with the police and the Depart-
ment of Justice both waiting to get some-
thing on him, so that nobody will find out
that he's a better detective than either of
them. I don't know how you got your job,
but I do know that he'd throw you over-
board in a minute if you got in a jam.
Now you won't get in a jam if you play
straight with me."

"What do you want? I got to send in
a report every day. Of course, I could
hold out something."

"Oh, no," said Charlie, smiling. "Don't
hold out anything. Put in everything you
see. So far, unfortunately, there's been
nothing to hold out."

"You want me to fake something, and
maybe go up for perjury?"

"No, no, Larrabee. You ought to know
I don't like to do things crudely. Just re-
port what you see. If you don't see any-
thing, say so. If you do, say so."

"I don't quite see it," Larrabee admit-
ted, "but I know damned well you win
either way."

"Sure!" said Strawn, still smiling. "I
win either way. So do you, if you string
along with me."

"And you won't spill anything?"

"Why should either of us spill anything?
We used to be friends, and we're friends
still. We used to be useful to each other,
and maybe we can be useful to each other
again."

XIII

AN American tourist sat in the Café de
la Paix, drinking a Scotch highball that
didn't taste like the Scotch of the good old
days, fingering a carefully trimmed beard
that was ridiculous to the point of ab-
surdity, and reading the New York papers
with growing alarm.

Greenwich Village was in the papers
again. Things that happened in the Vil-
lage were always news. A reform wave in
the Village was considerably more impor-

tant than a reform wave in Brooklyn or the
Bronx.

The center of the present agitation
seemed to be a certain Angelo Sartoresco,
from whose quaintly named cellar dump a
sixteen-year-old girl had been taken, suffer-
ing from wood alcohol poisoning. That
had made a great disturbance. Prominent
citizens of the Village—Henry didn't know
that they were Old Ninth Warders—were
interviewed at length on the need of abol-
ishing the cellar dumps. A delegation of
women voters had gone to see the mayor,
and had got promises of assistance.

Mr. Sartoresco had given out a lengthy
interview on the need of joy in life and the
right of young people to have a good time.
Unfortunately, his utterance contained the
suggestion that the cellar dumps, being
young people's social clubs, were virtually
a public utility. The mayor at once emit-
ted two columns about the probable con-
nection between corrupt public utility in-
terests and commercialized vice in Green-
wich Village; and with Villagers and Old
Ninth Warders denouncing each other right
and left, the crusade seemed likely to grow
far beyond its beginnings.

The beginnings, indeed, had dropped out
of sight in the more recent papers that came
to Henry Pollard's attention. The poisoned
girl, slowly recovering in Bellevue, had ad-
mitted that she had got the poisonous
whisky from a man whom she met outside
the café, and whom she brought in with
her. Sartoresco had been discharged in the
police court, and his lawyer had demanded
the arrest of Patrolman Gilfoyle for op-
pression. The police commissioner was
considering the matter. The reform asso-
ciation was making Gilfoyle a hero.

It looked to Henry as if the Village was
about to see a general uprising of the re-
spectable aborigines against the Villagers,
and the resultant civil war would be no
place for Mrs. Henry Pollard.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Pollard had been en-
joying herself. Henry had in his hand the
first batch of reports from his detective
agency. Absurd of them to misunderstand
him, and to suppose that he wanted daily
reports of his wife's doings! All that he
wanted was to be sure she was safe. On
second thought, perhaps it had been absurd
of him not to spend a dollar or two on a
fuller explanation in the cablegram.

Probably he was wrong. Henry had
been thinking over a good many things

during his European exile, and had come to the conclusion that he had usually been wrong, at least in the past six years. The foundations of a successful and contented life, which might have continued in perfect satisfaction till his dying day while he worked at the office and had no time to think about it, had been undermined by three months of enforced reflection in his European solitude.

He had usually been wrong, and Enid had usually been right. No wonder the poor girl felt that she would have to get away from Keatstown to have a good time!

Anyway, she was having it now. Henry picked a sheet of paper at random from the mass:

REPORT OF OPERATIVE ASSIGNED TO NO. 24 MINUIT STREET

June 6—Subject rose about 11 A.M. Practiced scales till twelve. Cary woman called early in afternoon; stayed half an hour. Subject gave a party in the evening; ten couples; singing and dancing. Janitor reports twelve gin bottles and three Chartreuse bottles sent down on dumb-waiter next morning. Three telephone calls after midnight, threatening report to police if the noise continued. No effect.

Party broke up about 3 A.M. Cary woman, Jos. Carmel, and Chas. Strawn stayed a few minutes later. Cary woman and Carmel then left. After five minutes Strawn left. Subject slept till noon.

Henry groaned. His wife slept till noon. She gave parties that kept the neighbors awake and led to threats of calling the police. Worst of all, she associated with the disreputable Cary woman, against whom he had especially warned her.

This wouldn't do at all, with so much in the papers about the reform wave in the Village. Henry had seen and even contributed to several reform waves, and he knew that they are apt to wave a little more freely than those who start them intend. The first thing he knew, his wife would be arrested for keeping people awake at three o'clock in the morning. It wouldn't do at all!

Their agreement called for a six months' separation, but no loving husband would let loyalty to the letter restrain him when his wife needed his protection. Poor Enid, alone and helpless in the Village! He would sail on the next boat. He would cable her this moment.

Then came reflection. After all, she might not see things as he did. She would be glad to see him, he felt sure, but she

might not be glad to get a cable warning her that he was coming home. She would know, of course, that his return meant giving up her association with the Cary woman, and Enid was stubbornly—even stupidly—loyal to her friends.

He looked over the reports again; and then it occurred to him that they all ended the same way. Whether Enid had gone to the theater, or to a party, or spent the evening at home—she did that now and then—the report ended:

Chas. Strawn and the Cary woman left between twelve and one.

Always the Cary woman! And good old Charlie Strawn, who knew who the Polards were in Keatstown, was standing by her like a true friend. He hadn't been able to keep her away from the Cary woman, but he was always there to preserve her from the influence of bad associations—always there!

Henry looked over the reports again. Charlie Strawn, whom he remembered as a boy in Keatstown, who had persuaded him to lease the studio, who had convinced him that Enid would be safe in the Village—Charlie Strawn was always there!

No, he wouldn't cable to Enid, but he would go home. Home, right away!

The Paris sailed to-morrow. At this season he could still find a stateroom aboard her, even at the last moment. He would go home—and before he went he would get rid of this abominable beard.

Going home! Henry felt better already. He could stop idling and get some action. Action—that was what he needed!

It suddenly occurred to him that the life of idleness that he had been leading for the past three months in Paris and Vienna, with nothing to do but amuse himself and to give an occasional order to a servant, which resulted in his being fed, was exactly the life that Enid had been leading for six years—in Keatstown. No wonder she had to go somewhere and blow off steam!

Henry cursed himself furiously for not having perceived this sooner—for having left it to Charlie Strawn to provide what might, or might not, be a safety valve. He would do better, if he had another chance!

Certainly he couldn't afford to wait any longer. Never mind his agreement to stay away six months; it wouldn't be safe. He would go back to Enid at once, and unannounced. He would surprise her. A

mean, suspicious voice inside of him kept saying that he would confront her.

XIV

PATROLMAN GILFOYLE, pausing on the corner of Washington Square to glance down toward Minuit Street, was accosted by Joe Carmel.

"Well, Marty, just read the reform association's bulletin. I see you're a hero now!"

"Yes," said Marty gloomily; "but if you could see some of them that's tryin' to make me a hero, Joe! Of course, the trouble was that this bird Sartoresco hadn't sold the stuff, and he's got a drag somewhere. I thought I was goin' to be broke, Joe. I may be yet. It ain't all over, by any means. I may be a hero to the reform association, but I ain't a hero at the station house. All they figure is that I pulled a boner; so no matter how this thing comes out, I'll be the goat."

"I've done all I could for you, Marty."

"I know you have, Joe, and I'm obliged to you."

"But Sartoresco's got influence somewhere. You ought to be careful, anyway, makin' collars with so little evidence."

Patrolman Gilfoyle's jaw set.

"Well, Joe, it says in this little book I got in me pocket:

"Observe persons living in idleness, without any apparent means of support, particularly those who congregate in poolrooms, saloons, and coffee houses.

"Don't take it for granted that conditions on your post are all right. Thoroughly investigate any condition which appears to be suspicious or out of the ordinary.

"And, Joe, I don't figure they'd have put that down in print unless they meant it. I observe a lot of persons living in idleness in this part of town, especially them as hang out in the cellar dumps; and when a girl comes up the steps and flops over and squeals that she's gone blind, that looks to me like a condition that's suspicious and out of the ordinary."

"Yes, but you've got to use discretion, Marty. These things are all right to talk about, but you got to remember how the world is made and fit yourself to it."

"I ain't hired to think about how the world is made, Joe. I'm hired to obey orders."

"Yes, and you see what it gets you. Use your head, Marty—use your head!"

"My head ain't so good as yours, Joe, but maybe you're right. You was always wiser than me. It says in the book, 'Be curious'; but I guess maybe a guy can be too curious. I certainly run into a truckload of trouble that time!"

"The worst about a thing like that," said Joe, "is that it makes trouble for people that aren't to blame. This crusade has hurt real estate values. I wouldn't mind that if it was necessary, but you never can tell where a thing like this will stop. It gives the old ward a bad name. There's so much right and wrong on both sides—"

He stopped, listening in horror to the echo of his own words. It was the first time Joe had had to admit that there could be right and wrong on both sides.

The shock to Marty was greater still.

"If it looks that way to you," he sighed, "it must be so. I been figurin' myself that there was right and wrong on both sides, but that didn't seem possible; but if you see it that way, I give it up. Anyway, they don't hire me to figure out right and wrong. They hire me to do what I'm told, and I done it, and now they're closin' in on me, and maybe they'll get me."

"Not if I can help it, Marty; but remember—it doesn't pay to be too curious."

Marty nodded and went his way, but he couldn't cheer up. The fundamental conviction of his soul, since childhood, that Joe Carmel was the wisest of the wise, had been shaken. He had discovered that there were drags and influences which seemed to be too strong for Joe; and worse than that was this appalling discovery that there was a question of right and wrong too tangled for Joe to solve. Where in the universe was there firm ground on which to stand?

A familiar and disliked figure crossed his line of vision as he strolled down Minuit Street—Charlie Strawn, emerging from No. 24 and carrying a violin case.

Charlie, of course, had kept out of sight in the Sartoresco affair, so Marty's dislike was instinctive rather than reasoned; but it was powerful. Moreover, according to his little book, Mr. Strawn was a legitimate object of suspicion. He was a person living in idleness, without visible means of support. He often carried a violin case about the streets at night, and musical instrument cases were objects so suspicious as to be mentioned in Marty's little book.

Also it had come to Marty's ears that the trombone case which he had been

tempted to investigate on the night of Enid's party had really been worth investigating. A lot of people had had the laugh on him about that. It was a strong temptation, now, to investigate all musical instrument cases—a strong temptation to investigate Charlie Strawn; but, with a sigh, he turned down the side street.

He couldn't afford to use that untrustworthy head of his, now that they were closing in on him. Maybe Joe, the wise one, was right. It didn't pay to be too curious.

XV

It might have cheered Marty up if he had known that the suave and imperturbable Mr. Strawn, the master mind of the Village, also had the desperate feeling that they were closing in on him. He was making no progress at all with Enid. She was still glad to see him, but somehow he generally had to call in the early afternoon, when Gilda Cary was there. They had agreeable musical parties, with Gilda at the piano and Charlie playing violin obbligatos to Enid's songs; but they were always parties of three.

In the evening, Enid had developed a sudden taste for the theater. Charlie was allowed to buy the tickets, and hire the taxi, and sit with her through the play—even allowed to bring her home; but almost before he had his hat off Gilda was sure to drop in on her way home from work, for cocoa and sandwiches.

He had had hopes of next Saturday night. Werner, Enid's teacher, was giving a party, and Enid had asked Charlie to go with her. Then they would be alone together—when he brought her home, at least. He might resume the advances that had been shut off on the night of the housewarming.

But after he had made his promise to go to the party, with such enthusiasm that he couldn't back out, he had learned that Mrs. Werner was a zealous church member. The party must accordingly break up before midnight brought the Sabbath; and that meant that he would bring Enid home to find Gilda on the spot, as usual.

Oh, it wasn't accident—it was a plot! He saw it all now. This crafty, designing woman had wound him around her finger, and was doing it still. Even since the night of the housewarming she had strung him along and held him up for theater

tickets a dozen times, although he had thought that he was safe, because there was nothing more for her to get out of him.

Charlie Strawn thought over the history of their relations, and discovered that nothing on earth would give him so much joy as a chance to sink his fingers into Enid's chubby neck and choke the life out of her.

That couldn't be done, of course. It would be too crude and too dangerous. Mr. Strawn's checkered and well concealed career had included one or two shootings, but he had never had to shoot a woman. Sometimes he could have shot Enid with great pleasure, but unfortunately he was with her so much that it would be impossible to throw off suspicion.

There must be some way to get her, however. Necessity was the mother of invention, and he would think up some way to get even with Enid, and with her abominable husband, and with the Cary girl, too. He would get the three of them!

However, Charlie couldn't give his full attention to getting anybody just now, for the evening papers had told him, in letters three inches high, that Estermore & McFee had gone into bankruptcy.

Charlie's stock speculations had been conducted through Estermore & McFee. All the profits of his cellar dumps had been poured into his account on their books. His stocks had been going down lately, but he had covered time and again, and Estermore & McFee still owed him about fifty thousand dollars; but he learned from the evening papers that they owed other people about five million dollars, and that the discoverable assets didn't amount to more than twenty-five or thirty thousand.

So far as the laborious savings of his belated years of prosperity were concerned—and any saving was laborious to Charlie—he was ruined. Of course, he still had his cellar dumps, but they were closing in on him there, too. Sartoresco had been arrested again—this time on the complaint of an officer of the reform association, who charged him with maintaining a nuisance. The manager of another of Strawn's cellar dumps had unexpectedly been notified that he would have to rebuild his exit to conform to the regulations of the Bureau of Fire Prevention.

There was more behind this than a mere reform association. Somebody was gunning for him.

(To be concluded in the December number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

I'm Sorry I Committed Suicide

THE STRANGE STORY OF A SPIRIT WHO RETURNED TO WATCH
HER FORMER HUSBAND

By Florence Wobber

WHEN I committed the rash act which severed my relations with the material world, I believed my method of release to be the only solution for my difficulties. It must have been the restless perversity of my detached and wandering spirit which prompted me to attend their wedding—*his* wedding with the other woman.

After my death I did not immediately return to brood over the path of my once happy marital existence. I speak of that happiness which was mine until she—that other woman—came to interfere with its dreams and illusions.

Six months had elapsed. It was only six months since he had laid me away in the narrow chamber of my long sleep—laid me away tenderly, with decorous tears and suppressed emotion. His demonstrations were dignified and sincere. I believed in his tears. Of course, they were a dutiful and a social necessity. Every detail of the funeral and the mourning was sufficiently regular, elegant, and gratifying.

It was the announcement of their wedding that beckoned my spirit to watch their destiny.

For reasons intelligible only to the spirit mind, I attended the ceremony. I listened to their low-spoken vows. Then, with a curiosity which seemed more appropriate for the flesh than for a detached spirit, I decided to follow and abide with them.

I was not jealous of her happiness or of her beauty as I saw her standing in her golden blond loveliness beside him at the altar. By my voluntary death I had released him for this very purpose. Why

should not he marry, since his love for me existed no longer?

By my spontaneous deed of self-destruction I had neatly avoided the blot of a scandal and averted a divorce. It was well and cleverly done. I found my spirit self wondering if he appreciated this phase of my generosity. It was a wild, sudden, vengeful impulse at the time, but now it assumed the glamour of heroic unselfishness and sacrifice.

He appeared more quiet and reserved than of old. His wide, smooth forehead below the thinning brown hair, brushed straight back, revealed a network of finely etched lines, and his deep-set hazel eyes were clouded with sadness. I could not determine whether it was a twinge of guilt, yet it had not the identity of regret. Was there anything to regret?

Naturally my act of releasing him was somewhat abrupt and rather gruesome. Imagine coming home and finding a wife saturated with illuminating gas! However, it had the virtue of being less untidy than many other methods. Poisoned bodies are subjected to undignified chemical analysis. Strangled bodies are unsightly; and where the revolver is the expedient, there is a grave possibility of soiling the carpets and the furniture.

"Accidental death" was the verdict.

But all this I wish to leave to oblivion. Let me resume my narrative.

II

I WENT to reside with them in the cozy little apartment, with its automatic elevator, its kitchenette, its hide-and-seek ap-

pointments—disappearing beds, surprise closets—and its countless conveniences, necessary or useless.

I did not require any space. A spirit has many needs, but not the mortal ones of lodging, raiment, sustenance, and social diversions.

I did not see in the apartment anything that had belonged to me. I wondered what had become of my pearl necklace and my wedding ring, my inlaid furniture and my Persian rugs. I knew that they had not been buried with my body, in Chinese fashion, but where were they?

He was perfectly adorable to her, courteous and ever anxious to please, at times almost apologetic. He did not seem quite like the old love of my marital experience. I cannot explain exactly, but—well, he was different.

She was very well satisfied, especially when he gave her presents and money and talked about a prosperous future. Later I saw that it was absolutely necessary for him to have a prosperous future, as far as she was concerned. She spent his money as I never supposed money could be spent. She needed a quantity of needless things, articles of fancy soon tossed aside.

I did not spy on their closer privacy. I lived as a near friend, an unseen guest.

One morning, four weeks after the wedding, she came to breakfast in a pout—a pretty pout, indeed—with pink breakfast coat and frilly boudoir cap. How could a pout on those full-arched, doll-like lips be otherwise than fascinating?

I watched him closely. He looked worried. He tried to placate her with many little gallantries and kindnesses, but I soon perceived that she wanted a promise of something—something that money could buy.

I hovered very close to them and listened eagerly.

"If you love me," she said, "you wouldn't put me off from day to day over a little thing that would please me!"

"I want you to be happy," he replied; "but, dear, never in my life have I borrowed or gone into debt for luxuries. I must be just before I am generous. I must think of necessary things before extravagances.

"Oh, that's it! I am accused of extravagance!" Little steel-cold glints seemed to dart from beneath the long, dark lashes of her deep blue eyes. "You must

have the money to pay for my whims before you will consider indulging them. My friends have their cars and their chauffeurs, and I'm beginning to detest the sight of a street car. It isn't as if we couldn't afford it. It's only your narrow ideas of business morality!"

"I wish you'd have patience until the Baldwin deal is put through. That will give me the necessary funds to meet a few minor liabilities, buy you a splendid car, and maintain a chauffeur. I've always played safe, and I don't like to step into deep water without knowing where I'm going to land."

For a while she was silent. Then, in a manner much like that of a condemned martyr, she murmured resignedly:

"Very well! I'll say no more about it."

She did not, nor did she say much else. Her silence harassed him, though she maintained it sweetly and uncomplainingly.

He kissed her and went out. Was it the impulse of my sympathies, or did I see a dejected slant in his broad shoulders, usually so straight? Was his step less elastic and free than of old?

She waved her hand to him from the window, and turned back into the room. Her eyes had a peculiar gleam. She paced the floor for some time, uttering angry, condemning words.

"He could do it without injuring his finances in the least," she declared. "His ideas of obligations are ridiculous!"

Perhaps they were. I had never disputed or questioned them. I had expected to own a car some day. I should have loved it, but I had never even hinted for one. I wondered if he remembered that!

The maid entered and removed the breakfast litter. The postman brought some letters.

Suddenly an expression of pleasure crossed her frowning face, erasing all traces of dissatisfaction. She opened one of the letters eagerly, and read it with deep absorption. Then she sat and mused. Now and again a little shadow of perplexity flitted over her eyes.

"Two years!" she breathed softly. "Now he is returning with wealth and distinction. I believed he had forgotten me, but he declares he has thought of me often. What will he think of my marriage? I was hasty. Well, there is nothing to prevent my seeing Harold, but I shall not tell Richard. Harold must be made to under-

stand that it was all his fault. He should have written months ago."

I suppose I should have been glad to witness this proof of her shallow feelings, but I was not. I resented her decision to deceive the man who had once been my husband, yet I could do nothing. I could not warn him.

She wrote to Harold, and her mood became gracious and pleasant.

When he returned home that evening, she was, to all outward appearances, quite oblivious of the cloud she had created to cast a gloom over his busy, troubled day. He became happy by the persuasion of her gentler mood. I had not followed her, but I knew what had wrought the transformation in her.

III

FROM this point a change seemed to come over her. She grew nervous and petulant, and at times wept bitterly. She went out every afternoon, and sometimes she came in quite late for dinner. Her excuses were accepted by her husband without suspicion, yet I imagined that more than once, when she was not aware of his gaze, he looked inquiringly at her.

Harold did not come to the house, but I felt sure that she saw him daily. She was beginning to act like a caged animal, pacing the floor when her husband was absent, but pretending devotion in his presence. It was evident that this effort of pretense was unnerving her. Her husband gradually became aware of her forced attitude and her artful devices to hide a growing anxiety.

Her Nemesis was merciless. She could not rest. She was becoming resentful and quarrelsome. He was growing weary, heartsick, and worried.

I saw all the domestic contentions and reconciliations. The reconciliations were appalling, so threadbare and obvious in their disguises and pretenses were they. Many times I thought of flight, for it grieved me to witness his suffering; but I could not tear myself away. My fascination for the morbid kept me prisoner, even as it had driven me into the shackles.

I tried to persuade myself that I was the menace to their domestic relations, yet I felt beyond a doubt that Harold was the flaw in their jewel of happiness.

All my sympathy was for the husband. Perhaps I still loved him in spirit, in spite

of the revelations of my material life. As time passed, I became quite certain of it.

This being true, it was strange that I experienced no pangs of jealousy. Jealousy must be entirely mortal—a fault in the carnal substance. I was happiest when they were agreeable to each other. When they were incompatible, I suffered. I grieved with him. With an intensity almost human, I resented her wronging him.

One evening she did not return for dinner. He ate little, and looked so utterly sad that I longed to wrap my spirit arms about him and murmur words of comfort, as I used to do in the days before I heard of the other woman.

When she came home, he gently asked her where she had been. She stormed, and, to cover her agitation, accused him of some trifling fault. He did not argue with her or press her for an explanation, but sat in dejected dreariness long after she had banged the door of her room and retired.

A few nights later she was again absent from dinner, and again she had left no word of excuse.

How my spirit yearned over him, as he sat alone at his dinner, and later, when he sat looking into the open grate!

I saw him take a card case from his pocket, open it, and press a tiny spring at the edge of the lid. The thin silver lining slid back and revealed a photograph. I could not see the portrait, for he hastily put it to his lips, held it there for a breathless, passionate moment, and then replaced it in his pocket. His eyes were clouded with tears, and his face was white and tragic-looking.

How he loved her! The kiss on her picture told the story of his deep feeling for the woman who was so shamelessly deceiving him.

When she came in, he attempted to converse with her, but she evaded. He insisted that she should tell him what her reasons were for acting so unseemly. When confronted with his determination to probe for the cause, she frustrated his purpose with a wild outburst of hysteria.

"I cannot stand it!" she wailed. "There's something haunting me, overpowering my better impulses, making it impossible for me to feel and act normally. I am not happy! Oh, I wish I were dead and at rest, as—as—"

She suddenly ceased speaking. In her words was there an implied accusation

against my spirit? I would not tolerate such an imputation!

He was greatly perturbed, even alarmed. She was diverting his suspicions. My being present was merely coincident with her strangely expressed excuse.

He held her in his arms and attempted to soothe her, but I noticed that his zest for caressing her had lessened, that it bore evidence of pretense.

After that he bought her an automobile, and watched hopefully for a change in her attitude. Disappointment crowned his efforts, for the car afforded her no pleasure. The lack of it had now become the least of her troubles.

Later I learned, with a pang of dismay, that his business was failing. The judgment of his harassed mind had played a traitor's part. Fear of its consequences to his tottering domesticity was precipitating the ruin.

When she learned the state of his affairs, she did not wince. The revelation seemed to have the effect of a release from uncertainty, from indecision.

He did not notice that phase of its effect on her. He was not searching for effects. His mind was in an abyss of confusion and turmoil.

She said something about his not worrying on her account. I did not quite catch the meaning of the words. He paid no heed. It was plainly evident that his mind was striving to work out its own solaces and reconciliations.

She went to her room. He stared intently at the closed door for a long time. Then he took the little card case from his pocket, touched the spring, and gazed fixedly at the inclosed picture.

I beat my spirit hands upon my invisible breast, and yearned wildly toward him. I felt terribly stricken and grieved, but not for one moment was that feeling inspired by jealousy. It was in pure, holy love for him, this suffering human being whom my dust lips had called husband.

IV

NEXT morning they ate their breakfast in strained silence. He kissed her and went out—down into the hard, cruel marts, to face the world and fight his battle against encroaching failure.

When he had gone, she sprang up and hastened to her room. Later she came out with two suit cases, went to the window,

and waited. I could see that she was expecting some one.

Presently she made a sign to the street below, and opened the door of the apartment. I heard quick, springing steps along the hall, and a tall, handsome young man came into the room.

"It's the only way, little sister," he said. "When you put your feet into a dead woman's shoes, you are certain to feel uncomfortable, to say the least. A trip abroad, new scenes, new faces—that's the wisest course!"

"It doesn't seem quite fair," she pleaded, "but I can't face him with the truth. From the moment we came to this apartment I knew that I did not love him. Love vanished like a vision when that door closed upon us. There were times when I thought of the great oblivion, and the tragic distance from that window to the street. I know it's cold-blooded at this crisis in his affairs, but I cannot pretend another day!"

They went out and closed the door—never to return.

That evening I was there alone to receive him, yet he was as oblivious of my presence as ever.

The maid had laid the dinner table for one. At first sight of it, with its solitary cover, he stopped in perplexity. After a moment of irresolution he opened the door of her room and went in. I heard him walking about. Suddenly he paused, and I heard the tearing of an envelope. At least she had left him a note.

Presently he came back into the dining room and sat down to his solitary dinner. I was puzzled by his complacency, his lack of demonstrativeness.

After dinner he sat in the deep, comfortable chair before the open grate, musing. Then he took the little card case from his pocket, touched the spring, and held the picture to his lips. His eyes were closed, and an expression of reverent peace settled over his brooding face.

Later he laid the open card case on the arm of the chair. With a deep, yearning tenderness I leaned above him, and my spirit gaze rested on the image in the case. It was not her picture!

My shadow soul quivered back, beaten down by a tremendous, appalling wave of realization. Great seas of bitter regret washed over my agonizing senses.

That face! That face! Oh, Guardian

and Keeper of drifting spirits of no bourne or destiny, that picture was the image of my own mortal face!

In the misery of regret and contrition, I leaned above his dear, lonely form. My invisible yearning hands caressed his bowed head. I tried to wind my hunger-aching

arms about him, but they fell back into their own spirit circle, empty, unsated.

Oh, the utter futility of my craving passion!

That last mortal act of self-destruction had lost me all, all!

I'm sorry I committed suicide!

The Flaw in the Trap

THE STORY OF MARK WYTHE'S LOYALTY TO AN OLD NAME
AND AN OLD FAMILY

By Douglas Newton

"CHRIS LYALL swears the girl is pretty," said old Zachary Wythe, with his brittle-dry satisfaction. "That will appeal to Guy. She's certainly got the money. There'll be what her mother left her, what Chris will settle on her when she marries, and what he'll leave her when he checks in. He gave me his word on that. It's a fine match. It'll save Saltacres for us Wythes."

"It's rather like buying and selling in the market place," Mark Wythe said slowly.

"Confound the boy and his sentimental slop!" growled his uncle. "Buying and selling! I'm talking of my own nephew and the daughter of my best friend. Why, Chris Lyall sees it like that, too, but then he's not a romantic young ass. He was my best pal, boy and man, in the old days, and when I met him after all these years down in Selborne he hadn't changed. He knows all about the Wythes and Saltacres, and understands the bitter shame of our going under. Why, he was the one to suggest this. His daughter has the money to save Saltacres, and I've got the nephew to marry her. Besides, it links old friends. It's only natural."

"What about the girl?"

"Chris reckons it's time she was married. She's fully grown, and she's getting a bit beyond him, it seems. Has a will of her own, this Miss Christine, though I don't wonder at that. Chris is a bit of a

stiff-chin himself. Besides, there's no one around Plympton but fortune hunters and nobodies, and he's getting worried about her future."

"Even that doesn't seem a good reason for marrying her to somebody like Guy," said Mark curtly.

"Guy is the next Wythe in line," snapped Zachary Wythe.

"He's as unstable as water, a waster, and more than a little bit of a scamp in the matter of women," said Mark.

"Aye, he's wild," agreed old Zachary. "I'd rather it were you, Mark, but there it is—he's next in line, and you're only next but one. I've got to be just."

"And if the raffish Guy shouldn't appeal to the lady?" asked Mark, distinctly relieved that duty wasn't going to force him into a loveless marriage.

"I guess that will be all right. Guy is a good-looker, and he has a way with women—too good a way sometimes, the young fool! He knows what I expect of him, and he's too much in debt just now to risk being cut out of my will. He'll behave this time. Besides, I'm sending you down to Plympton with him."

"Me? Have I got to act nursery governess to that young cub?" cried Mark in disgust.

"You have, because it's important. Nothing is to be settled until the young people meet and Chris Lyall has decided that Guy is acceptable. Chris has grown

mighty stiff and strict these days, and just a hint of anything wrong will set his face against Guy. You'll have to see that nothing goes wrong. You've got to see that Guy doesn't go gallivanting around in his usual way. He must be kept out of mischief, for the future of Saltacres and the Wythes is at stake."

Mark saw that as powerfully as his uncle, for Saltacres and the family succession were a passion with him, too. His gravely handsome, dark, high-boned face showed that he was willing to make almost any sacrifice for it; and yet he felt that some sacrifices were beyond reason.

"I'll do my best, of course," he said; "but I don't know that it's quite a straight deal for the girl, Guy being Guy."

"Slush!" snarled his uncle. "Do stop being sentimental! Guy's a Wythe, and that means something. Also, if he has been a bit of a rake, marriage will steady him. Christine Lyall can do worse, let me tell you. Chris told me there's a man at Plympton who is dangerous—a smooth, handsome, slick fellow named Waritch. He seems to be an unscrupulous rascal with a lot of dash and an unpleasant record, who'll stick at nothing to get her and her money. Do you think Guy a worse choice than that?"

"Perhaps not; but it seems pretty hard luck on a nice girl."

"Be practical! Are you going along to keep Guy in hand, or are you letting Saltacres down?"

"Oh, I'm a Wythe, too" smiled Mark. "I'll go."

II

THEY went to Selborne for a week on their way to Plympton, and Guy Wythe, in spite of his promises to his uncle, proceeded to be very much Guy. Their visit to the town had been merely a matter of buying clothes, but Guy made it mainly a matter of women.

First there was Jane Curtis. There arose some trifling difficulty in the hotel foyer. Guy, as usual, dashed in to set matters right, and there they were linked with a woman, a chance acquaintance, only half an hour after their arrival. Mark expostulated with his cousin, after they had all agreed to meet at dinner.

"Don't worry, Mr. Grundy!" jeered Guy. "No fear of trouble with a mild little peach of that kind!"

Perhaps Guy was right. There was nothing dashing or flashy about Jane Curtis. Guy, in fact, did not think her pretty. Mark wasn't so sure. There was something about the carriage of Jane's strong yet fine figure, something that seemed to lurk at the back of the clear candor of her face, which hinted that she might be lovely if only she cared to make the most of herself. It was a subtle beauty, maybe, and perhaps that was why Guy missed it. He liked looks to be brazen and bold, as they were in the case of Leonora Dubert.

Leonora was the next woman on the scene. She came when they had been in Selborne two days, when Guy was already losing interest in Jane.

"Not much pep in that girl," he yawned. "Let's give her a miss and find a night club!"

"We've agreed to wait for her here, and—well, I find her rather charming," said Mark.

"You would!" sneered Guy, his eyes sweeping over his cousin's big, sober figure. "Give me something with a larger dash of cayenne! Dances nicely, yes, but, by gosh, she's about as lively as tatting. She hasn't a thing to say for herself, either."

"That may be your fault," said Mark. "I find her very well read and well informed. And then living in the country has made her like the things we like."

"Keep off the 'we'! I have no love for root crops and the little flowers of the hedges. Give me a human girl who can be gay and bright—some one with a dash of the devil in her, who knows how to put zip into life—like, by gosh, that queen peach over there!"

That was the dawn of Leonora. She had just entered the winter garden of the hotel with a tall, lean man who would have been as handsome as a Red Indian chief if his eyes had not been set so close to his hawk nose, and if the twist of his thin lips had not been so sneering. Leonora herself was brilliant and brassy and sumptuous. From her metallic gold hair to her extravagant turquoise shoes she was a glittering note of enticement.

"Some girl, that!" cried Guy in rapture.

Mark studied the brazen beauty. There was no doubt at all about Leonora's beauty, of its kind.

"She looks like the greatest common multiple of all the cinema vamps," he said contemptuously, "with a strong dash of

beauty chorus added. Let's go and meet Miss Curtis."

"Sit still, you mutt!" snarled Guy. "You don't know a real she-girl when you see one. She's heading for the next table. I've got to know her, and I guess I'm going to!"

"Look here, Guy," snapped Mark. "Just remember your promises!"

"Get to blazes!" snarled Guy. "A fellow don't go off the rails by speaking to a girl once. I'm all right. You go off and talk of the joys of the rural life with Jane. It'll stop her butting in, anyhow."

Mark got up at once. That was a good idea. It was distasteful to think of Jane meeting such a woman, and he would prevent it. He hurried to the entrance just as Jane entered.

Jane did a strange thing. She stared past Mark in the direction of Guy's table, seemed to gasp, turned—and ran away. It was strange to see the impulsive haste with which she left the winter garden.

When Mark caught up with her, she seemed to shrink a little against the corridor wall.

"Well, well, what is it, Mr. Wythe?" she gasped.

"Why, nothing at all, Miss Curtis," he answered, a trifle startled. "I only came to tell you that there is somebody there—"

"You mean somebody who—that is, somebody I know?"

Yes, her manner was strange, but it helped.

"No," Mark said firmly. "It's somebody I don't think you'd want to know. My cousin has taken it into his head to meet a—well, a certain lady, and I feel that perhaps you would rather not share that acquaintance."

"I see," she said, staring.

Following her gaze, Mark saw, to his amazement, that Guy was already at the brazen woman's table, deep in talk with her, while the lean man looked on.

"I see and understand, Mr. Mark," Jane went on, smiling at him in a way that made her beauty a certainty. "It was nice of you—and like you. It helps me to make my own excuses. I only came down to tell you that I have a frightful headache, and will stay in my room. No, join your cousin, and don't worry. An aspirin and a rest are all I need."

Mark, a little disconsolate, joined Guy. He found out Leonora's name and that of

her companion, Jim Gunnis, and was immediately drawn deep into the strange, hectic gayety of the party. It was bright and brassy, and it bored him, but he could not escape. For one thing, he had to watch Guy; for another, Leonora seemed to fasten upon him.

"So you're the eldest of the gay Wythe cousins, as the beautiful boy here says?" she greeted him archly.

She sat beside him, talked to him exclusively, and shouldered the others aside. Guy was sullen at being left out in the cold, and was always trying to cut in. It was no good. Leonora insisted on making the encounter a duet for Mark and herself.

The man Gunnis got bored, and left them, on the plea of catching a midnight train from town. Leonora carried them off to a bright, feverish night club, and her efforts to win Mark grew more and more determined.

He was a little bewildered, but not altogether unflattered. Leonora was certainly beautiful, and she had the air of being able to command any man's attention, so that her interest was not without piquancy to a man rather shy of women. Mark was in no manner smitten, but he could not help being a little thrilled, and the fact that the all-conquering Guy was sulky at playing second fiddle added to it. Perhaps it would be a lesson to the young idiot.

But it wasn't. At breakfast, next morning, Guy's bad temper took the form of baiting Mark before Leonora. He jeered at "old Mark" as a stodgy country caterpillar who had unexpectedly changed into a bright town moth.

"Mark!" said Leonora, smiling in her most fixed manner. "Is his name Mark? Now that's funny! I'd got it into my head that his name was something really romantic—like Godfrey, or Geoffrey, or Guy."

"No, I'm the guy who's Guy," said Mark's cousin. "There's nothing romantic about Mark. He's a dull old stick wrapped up in rural joys."

Leonora's fixed smile flashed from one to the other.

"I guess that's why he didn't find me truly thrilling last night," she said. "I don't show up to advantage beside the charm of pa's best harrow." She turned her shoulder on Mark, and gave Guy her most electric smile. "I wondered why it was I felt like the something or other who wastes its whatever it is on the desert air!"

"I'm anything but a desert," grinned Guy, delighted at her new interest.

From that moment he proved his last assertion, and Leonora went out to make him prove it. From that moment, too, the trouble began, and Saltacres and the Wythe name began to be in danger. There was no reasoning with Guy about Leonora, once she had begun to show him favor. The old Guy came out. He threw all reason, all honor, all his promises to the winds. All he could think of was Leonora.

If Mark tried to reason with him, he cursed his cousin. If Mark threatened to tell old Zachary, he sneered.

"Give the game away, put old Lyall's back up, and see Saltacres and all the Wythes go smash, eh? Well, I guess you won't be such a fool!"

When Mark tried to interfere and take control of his movements, Guy gave his cousin the slip. By the evening of the fourth day he and Leonora had gone off somewhere together, and Mark did not know where.

III

THAT evening, when he was most miserable and bitter, Mark ran into Jane Curtis on the street. He brightened at the mere sight of her.

"I thought you had left Selborne," he told her. "Where have you been hiding yourself?"

"Oh, my headache kept me in my room most of yesterday, and then—well, probably you've been far too much occupied to notice me."

"That's not the least bit true," replied Mark, smiling. "I should be looking for you even if there was a crowd, Miss Curtis, and to-day there hasn't been even a sign of one."

"Mr. Guy?"

"He's occupied—elsewhere," said Mark bitterly.

"With the—er—rather striking lady?"

"Very much with her, the young ass!"

"And her companion?"

"Her companion? Oh, you mean the Gunnis fellow who was with her. He's gone home. He left us on the very first evening. I'm quite alone."

Probably it was that which awoke Jane Curtis's sympathy, for, after having kept out of sight for two days, she reappeared in the hotel, shared Mark's table during otherwise lonely meals, and even consented

to go to certain amusements with him. It was at one of these places that Mark was able to gather the full significance of Guy's folly.

Jane and Mark had got on so well, so charmingly, that it began to seem as if they could not have enough of each other's company. There was no real harm in their growing fond of each other. They were a fine, straight pair, both heart-free, and neither of them bound in honor—for Mark did not have the future of Saltacres upon his shoulders.

Mark gathered from what she let drop that Jane was a farmer's daughter, and was interested in her father's calling. That pleased him. Without quite making the thought definite, he felt that if ever he should take a wife she would be the kind of wife to make life happy for him, and to suit his circumstances. He knew quite well that whether Guy got himself the rich Christine Lyall or not, he, Mark, would always have to be the one who ran Saltacres as a practical proposition.

Growing upon warm and intimate terms, then, they considered it only natural to go to a new musical comedy that had come to Selborne. There they rediscovered Guy, with Leonora, in a box.

The sight filled Mark with rage against his cousin's folly. If Guy had deliberately wanted to make himself conspicuous with the woman, he could not have chosen better. They were perched up there, a flashy and conspicuous pair, for the whole crowded theater to see, and their behavior was abominable. Guy seemed to be drunk. At any rate, he was quite reckless of public opinion, and the woman seemed to be contemptuous of it. They spoiled the whole of the first act of the play for the audience with their monkey tricks and laughter. Mark felt like murdering Guy. He felt still more like it when he heard a man behind him growl:

"It's a disgrace that such a woman should even be allowed in the theater! Oh, she's notorious—Leonora Dubert, you know. Yes, *that* creature—a name to stink in one's nostrils. She's been publicly driven out of several towns. Why, merely to be associated with her means social ruin. I wonder who that young fool is!"

"They tell me his name is Wythe," replied the speaker's companion. "Yes, one of the Saltacres lot. Pretty low come-down for them, eh? It 'll be more than mere

disgrace if he's not careful. There's worse to it than the public goings-on the precious pair have indulged in for the last few days. Young Wythe has taken an apartment for her near where a friend of mine lives. My friend says it's scandalous. No hell café ever went to such lengths. The police will probably be asked to interfere before long. Hello, that's a good move! The manager is going to have them turned out of the theater."

In the disturbance, which attracted the attention of the whole house, for Guy did not take his ejection meekly, Mark excused himself to Jane and slipped out. In the empty foyer of the theater he strode up to Guy and snarled:

"You accursed young fool, if you have no decency, you might at least have discretion! You've got to stop this kind of thing right now!"

"Hello!" leered Guy. "It's Mark, the guardian angel. Hey, Mark, tell these bounders who I am, and that I'm not the sort to be treated this way!"

"Far too many people know who you are already, you fool! Don't you realize that you're ruining everything?"

"Gosh, I ought to have remembered that you're one large mass of highly moral dullness! Go away! I'm having a tip-top time, and I don't want it contaminated."

"Damn you and your good time! Haven't you any sense of honor? Don't you realize what you're here for, what you have promised your uncle to do?"

"That's all right," said Guy, a little sheepishly. "'Member all right. Feller must have last fling, though."

"Yes, and your confounded last fling is going to spoil everything, you young brute! It's going to put Mr. Lyall's back up against you, and the idea of marriage."

"Don't be stupid," said Guy sulkily. "How's he to know? And since he won't know—"

"How do you know he won't know? The whole town's talking of you already. They've got your name pat, and that woman's. It's more than likely he'll hear of it, and if he does—"

"Why should he hear?" insisted Guy, with sulky stubbornness. "It's only just a last fling. I'm cutting it out by the end of the week."

He hung hesitant, frightened.

"Cut it out now," urged Mark. "Cut it out before the smash comes, before Salt-

acres, the Wythes, and everything else suffer."

"Of course, if you—" began Guy.

Leonora called from their car, for they were on the sidewalk by now:

"Guy, old bean! Guy, darling, aren't you coming?"

Guy moved toward her.

"Guy!" rapped Mark.

"Oh, hide yourself, you darn spoilsport!" snarled Guy. "Leonora is the biggest peach that ever bloomed. To blazes with your Saltacres and your Wythes! Me for a good time at all costs!"

Mark was silent when he rejoined Jane, silent as they went to the hotel. Jane was sympathetic. Mark had told her something about Saltacres and the Wythes, and her native quickness seemed to give her a complete understanding of the tragedy of the situation.

"You couldn't get him away from that creature, Mark?" she asked.

"No!" replied Mark savagely. "No consideration of honor or decency has any weight with the fool. He doesn't care if it means the smash of everything!"

"Why should Guy mean the smash of everything?" she asked softly.

Mark, who until now had kept silent about the hope of saving Saltacres, who would still have kept silent had not his anger and anxiety carried him away, told her about Guy and Christine Lyall and the situation generally. He felt safe with her. She was sweet and stanch and straight. She would not let the matter go any further. She would give him the sympathy he very sorely needed.

She said softly, at the end:

"I don't see why you should worry, Mark. Nothing you can do will prevent Guy behaving as he does, and if it gets to this Mr. Lyall's ears—well, perhaps it will be for the best all round. It's better that Mr. Lyall and his daughter should know what type of man Guy is."

"You're leaving Saltacres out of the question. There's the Wythe succession to consider."

"Will that be in such bad hands?" she smiled. "If your uncle cuts Guy out of the will, there's you."

"Yes," said Mark, with a catch in his voice; "but you see Guy is the next in line and has the real right. All this arrangement has been made for him."

"And Guy's a rotter who doesn't deserve

Saltacres—to say nothing of the girl. I notice, Guy, you have little to say about this Christine Lyall yourself.”

“I know,” he said. “It’s because I dare not. When I think of Guy—”

“You feel that it’s a bad deal for the girl?”

“My very words to my uncle.”

“I’m glad you showed decency. And yet you went on with it!”

“There’s Saltacres.”

“I think, personally, that Saltacres will be better served with you as master.” Her eyes looked at him steadily. “I suppose, if Guy fails, you will take up your duty to the Wythes and marry this girl?”

Their eyes remained looking deep into each other’s for a long minute.

“No, Jane,” said Mark hoarsely. “I can’t do that, even for the Wythes. You know why, better than anybody. Perhaps that’s why—why I want Guy to succeed.”

They stood thus for a moment, looking deeply, hungrily, into each other’s hearts. Mark stretched out his hand to take hers.

“No—not that—not yet!” she said, and slipped away from him.

IV

MARK did not see Jane Curtis again. He was recalled to his duty to Saltacres by Guy, in Guy’s own peculiar way.

There came a frantic message from Guy in jail, and Mark had to rush to save the fool from the law. There had been some sort of unlovely disturbance in the apartment that Guy shared with Leonora, the police had come in, and Guy had been arrested. Leonora had managed to get right away. She had that gift.

It was a beastly and unlovely business. For two days the papers screamed of it, and the name of Wythe was the target for all manner of mud. Only by working like a man possessed, and getting first-class lawyers, did Mark manage to get Guy off with a fine.

Guy, sober, sullen, sniffing, had no manliness. He merely bewailed his ill luck.

“I believe that cat did it purposely,” he wailed. “Yes, I believe she aimed all the time to get me into this mess. I believe it was a put-up thing to smash me. I swear it! And—and I suppose I’m smashed!”

“I suppose you are,” said Mark grimly; “but the only way to find out is to go and see. Perhaps old Lyall hasn’t heard.”

They went straight to Plympton without

seeing Jane. She had vanished again. Old Lyall had heard. No doubt about that when they saw him standing, as stern, bitter, and rugged as a Puritan father, in his own house at Plympton. He stared at the young men as if they were filth. He held out some newspapers, and shook them in the faces of Mark and Guy in a passion of righteous anger.

“You come here? You dare to come here after *that*?” he cried. “You dare to defile my house with the beastliness and sin of you? You dare to think that I would overlook such shameless vice, that I or mine would be partners to such vileness? How dare you come? What have you to say?”

It was all over. The worst had happened, Mark saw. Old Lyall was hopelessly antagonized. The marriage was off, Saltacres had lost its one chance, the name of Wythe would go out in shame.

He stood staring at the fierce old man. He could say nothing. What was there to say in the face of certain ruin?

“Well, we thought we might—well, explain things,” Guy mouthed feebly. “We could give you facts—”

“Facts!” said a sneering voice behind Lyall. “Facts! I think the papers give plenty of those!”

A man appeared behind old Chris Lyall—a man with a sneering mouth and eyes set too close to a hawk nose—a man with a Red Indian face—Jim Gunnis. He looked in triumph at the two cousins, but mostly he looked at Mark.

“That ’ll do, Waritch,” said Lyall. “I’m beholden to you for the revelation, but I can deal with this myself.”

Jim Gunnis was Waritch! In a blaze of revelation Mark understood. Waritch was a smooth rogue who would stop at nothing to gain Christine Lyall’s hand and fortune. He had planned a deliberate trap to eliminate his rival, Guy Wythe. No doubt he had learned all there was to be learned about the nature of Guy Wythe, and how weak he was with women. He had deliberately introduced Leonora to bring about Guy’s downfall. He had bought the woman to do that—an easy matter, for she had no reputation to lose, and would do anything for money. He had bargained with Leonora to bring Guy to public disgrace, so that young Wythe would be ruined in the eyes of old Lyall; and he had succeeded. But had he?

When he drew back tactfully at old Chris Lyall's command, he showed the flaw in his plan.

"I only wanted to make it plain, Mr. Lyall, that I am here," he said smoothly. "Guy Wythe knows I saw him in Selborne with this woman. When you speak of facts, be careful that you don't mean lies, Guy Wythe, for I am here to give the truth!"

Waritch was sure of himself and of his ability to win, but his very sureness gave Mark hope; for when the fellow addressed himself to Guy Wythe, he looked straight at him—Mark Wythe.

Mark understood. He remembered how Leonora had concentrated her attention on him, Mark, when she had learned that he was the elder of the Wythes. She had thought that the elder cousin would be the one to succeed to Saltacres, forgetting that a younger brother might have a son older than the son of an elder brother. Then, when she found out her mistake, found out that she had got hold of the wrong man, she had turned her back on Mark, and had concentrated her efforts on Guy and on Guy's downfall.

He remembered, too, that Waritch had left them while she was still thinking that Mark was Guy. Apparently she hadn't troubled to inform him who really was Guy, and he was still under the impression that Mark was Guy, the Guy who had ruined his cause with old Lyall.

Mark saw, understood, and saw a way out. It meant sacrifice—yes, but Saltacres and the Wythe line called for sacrifice. Guy was saying on a fierce growl:

"You talk of that woman, you low dog!" Guy was saying, with a fierce growl. "Why, it was you—"

Mark checked him with a gesture. It was not merely that he knew old Lyall would not believe the preposterous tale of a trap, and that Waritch knew he wouldn't believe it. Mark had a stronger line to take. He stopped Guy.

"You are certain you saw me with this woman Leonora in Selborne?" he said thickly.

"No doubt of it! I saw you."

"You can swear it was I—not—not my cousin here, for example?"

Waritch smiled with disagreeable certainty. If they thought they could trick or shake him, they didn't know whom they had to deal with.

"I can swear it, all right," he said. "I saw you with the woman in the winter garden of the Royal Hotel. Her notoriety attracts public attention to her companions. Your name was on several tongues, Guy Wythe. There could be no mistake."

"There might be some mistake about *who* was infatuated with her," said Mark, in the manner of one trying to wriggle out of an *impasse*. "My cousin was with me and the lady."

"He was," sneered Waritch, seeing clearly that his man was aiming to shift the blame upon some one who did not count; "but make no mistake, Guy Wythe—it was you, and you alone, who received the woman's favors. She cold-shouldered your cousin. The fact is indisputable, even if these newspapers were not enough to clinch the matter."

"I don't dispute it," said Mark evenly. Then, turning to old Lyall, he added: "That is the explanation, sir."

"Eh? What are you driving at?" barked old Lyall.

"This—I am *not* Guy Wythe. My name is Mark Wythe."

"What?" cried Waritch, aghast.

"It is a fact," said Mark quietly. "I am Mark Wythe, though I admit that the woman Leonora, and others, thought me to be Guy. Hence the tragic misunderstanding, hence my gratitude that Mr. Waritch here can support my testimony."

Old Lyall glared between amazement and relief.

"You mean that not the real Guy, but you alone are concerned—that you are the blackguard who disgraced yourself in these disreputable orgies, who shared an apartment with that vicious woman?"

For a moment Mark, sick at heart, was silent. Admission meant shame, eternal disgrace, the smirching of the name and reputation that he had been proud to keep clean. It meant that Uncle Zachary would turn him away from Saltacres—pang enough, even if it didn't mean poverty. It probably meant an end with dear Jane Curtis; yet there was no other way out. Saltacres and the Wythe line hung in the balance. He must save them.

"It is as you say, sir," he said huskily. "Mr. Waritch will bear me out."

"Eh, Waritch? Is it true?" snarled old Lyall.

"Oh, it's true enough. He was the fellow with the woman," said Waritch sulkily.

"Then you are even more of a scoundrel than I imagined, sir!" old Lyall roared at Mark. "You posed as your cousin, dragged his name into the dirt, and risked his future!"

"I'm afraid so, sir. I'm horribly sorry," said Mark. "I don't excuse myself—except that she seemed to think that I was Guy in the beginning. It was wrong of me, especially as Guy himself didn't want me to be friends with the woman, and did his utmost to prevent us from being intimate."

That was true enough, if not in the way that old Lyall would understand it. Lyall took the line Mark had hoped—the line that would save Saltacres. He softened toward Guy, and blazed at Mark.

"I can well understand Guy's attitude!" he roared. "A decent Wythe would move heaven and earth to prevent one of his name from disgracing himself. As for you, sir, the sooner you hide your face from decent men the better. I shall write to your uncle. I shall make it plain to him that while there is a creature like you connected with Saltacres, there can be no hope of an alliance with my family. You are a low, disgusting, vicious brute!"

"And a very loyal and fine gentleman," said a voice from the door.

They all sprang about, and Mark gasped in dismay:

"Jane!"

V

It was Jane Curtis standing just inside the doorway, only somehow not quite Jane. It was the Jane whom Mark had met and loved in Selborne—the Jane of quietness, fineness, and candor; only now there was no chance of any man mistaking her loveliness. It was a Jane who knew exactly and precisely how to make the most of herself, and who had the means to do it. Her hair, the rich gleam of her silks, the whole expensive simplicity of her, made her beauty complete and radiant, where the soberness of a quiet country girl had made it a shy, subtle thing discoverable only by eyes that could see.

And she looked into those eyes now.

"By Jove, little Jane Curtis!" cried Guy, with the honey of admiration in his accent.

But it was at Mark that her eyes smiled, it was to Mark that she went, her face glowing.

"Jane!" he repeated huskily.

"Not exactly, Mark dear," she smiled. "We're both horrible—and yet honorable—deceivers!"

"Deceivers?"

Then old Chris Lyall revealed the truth.

"Christine, please leave us for a minute," he said.

"Christine!" gasped Mark. "You're Christine Lyall?"

"Christine," said Waritch, trying to make his voice smooth, "I'm afraid you don't quite know the true character of the brute you are talking to."

"I know—Mr. Jim Gunnis," she said scornfully, swinging on him. "I know the truth about him, about the true Guy Wythe, and about *you*!"

Waritch started back from her, completely at a loss.

"What do you know, Christine?" he stammered. "What is there to know? I don't understand."

"I do—perfectly," said Christine cuttingly. "I know how, in order to get rid of a dangerous rival and to shame Guy Wythe, you bought that woman Leonora, and how, under the name of Jim Gunnis, you introduced her to the man you thought was Guy Wythe. You knew this Guy Wythe's reputation, and you felt certain that Leonora would bring about his ruin. You were right enough in one respect, but quite wrong in another, for you make a mistake about the man!"

"Leonora didn't seem to make any mistake in her dealings with him, anyhow," said Waritch savagely, seeing how it was between Christine and Mark, and willing to strike a blow.

"Quite right again," said Christine. "The woman quickly found out what any decent man with eyes to see can see—that is, that Mark Wythe was not the man to succumb to a vulgar adventuress. She also found out at once what you have only just found out—the identity of the real Guy. She found him easier prey, and she did her work well, Mr. Waritch, for she most effectively brought him to the public shame you bargained for."

"Then it is the real Guy Wythe who figures in the newspapers, and that fellow there lied!" cried Waritch.

"Yes, Christine," cried her father. "This man Mark confessed that he was the Guy concerned in all the—"

"I heard him," interrupted Christine, smiling. "Of course he would. He's that

kind of man. He would sacrifice himself, everything, for the good name of Wythe and Saltacres. I'm proud of him."

"Damned sentimentality!" snarled Waritch. "What does it all mean? Guy was the man you were to marry. He's shown himself in his true colors, even to you. The all-for-Wythe-and-Saltacres business is off."

"That's for Mark to say," said Christine, blushing. "I think that the Wythe name and Saltacres would be better served if Mark succeeded. Saltacres is not entailed, you know, and Mark can take Guy's place in Zachary Wythe's will."

"That's true, that's true!" cried old Lyall, relieved at a way out. "Perhaps it is better so, even though the exposure of this young scoundrel was a filthy plot on your part, you cur!"

Waritch, to whom the last words were addressed, backed away. He desperately tried to defend himself.

"That be damned for a silly story!" he snarled. "I didn't argue about it before, because I felt you'd see it was too wild for words, Mr. Lyall. A plot? What rubbish! Even if it was, how could that girl know?"

"Because I was there, Jim Gunnis. Because I saw you introduce the woman Leonora to Guy Wythe in the winter garden of the Royal Hotel at Selborne."

"Well, that's a definite lie, anyhow! You weren't there. I didn't see you there."

"No, because I had the good fortune to see you first—and hide. I kept to my room on the plea of a headache, and stayed out of sight until you had gone."

"So that's the reason why you vanished for two days, Jane—Christine, I mean," said Mark.

"Confirmation from Mark, you see," smiled Christine. "Have you anything more to say, Mr. Waritch, before taking yourself out of this house for good? No? Well, I think you'll see the point of going at once. And you, Mr. Guy Wythe—yes, we all willingly excuse your presence."

"But, Christine," said her father in a puzzled tone, when Waritch and Guy had gone, "you say you were at Selborne. I thought you were staying with the Maylors, buying clothes."

"I was buying clothes, yes; but on my own, from the Royal Hotel at Selborne. I'd made up my mind to do it alone. You often say that I'm a little self-willed."

"But—but why go like that, under an assumed name, to the very hotel where—where Mark and Guy were staying? Why do a thing like that, my child?"

"Because, daddy," she said softly, her hand on his arm, her glowing eyes on Mark, "though I didn't exactly hate your idea of marrying into the Wythes, I did hate the buying and selling side of it. I—I wanted a husband who would want me—me alone, me for my own sake, and not for the sake of my money. I wanted my husband to—to love me as well as the Wythe inheritance. I thought by going like that I could win—love."

"And—and you think you have won it, Christine?" asked her father softly.

"What do you say, Mark?" whispered Christine, blushing.

"My dear, my dear, do you have to ask?" cried Mark, going to her.

"And so you see, you old darling," laughed Christine tremulously, with Mark's arm round her, "I was the wisest of the matchmakers, after all!"

HEART'S HAVEN

DAY after day with you in one long dream—

Divine monotony that is ever strange,

As gay and constant as a mountain stream

That changes always and yet knows not change—

Oh, darling, hold me safe and close with you,

We two, day after day! Oh, just we two!

We fear no rival to this garnered peace;

No wandering fancy, no sudden sorcery,

Has power upon our hearts; nought else can please

Us two that dwell where only we would be—

We two together, secure until we die,

And even then together, you and I!

Andrew McIver Adams

Anemones and Crabs

A TALE OF THE SEA AND SHORE CREATURES OF PUGET SOUND

By Herman Howard Matteson

ASPLAY finger of sunlight awakened him. He opened his burning eyes, and his numbed and stupid wits began to function. The mouth of a bottle, lying upon its side on the table, staring at him like a sinister eye, recalled to him what had happened.

Old Bill Clallam had tried to sell him a worthless set net location for the taking of salmon. He had refused the offer, but, because Bill's daughter had been mighty nice to him, he had tried to placate Bill by accepting a couple of drinks of moonshine that Bill had dug up from a cache. Unused to alcohol, the vile stuff had bowled him over. That was all there was to it—or was that all?

He flung his feet out of the bunk, picked up the fabric of his flannel shirt sleeve, and stared foolishly about the room. What had become of his heavy canvas coat? It was gone. In the side pocket of that coat there had been a leather sack containing exactly two hundred five-dollar gold pieces. The coat was gone, and so was the sack of gold.

He got to his feet unsteadily. It was in the edge of evening when he had come to the far end of the island with old Bill. Now it was morning—very early morning. He must have slept in drunken stupor all night. The two hundred golden coins were gone.

Suddenly he spat out a fisherman's oath. Old Bill Clallam had baited a hook for him, and he had taken it, hook, line, and sinker. Elie, Bill's pretty daughter, had been the bait; and toward brown-eyed Elie Clallam he directed his destroying rage, rather than at old Bill, the thief, her father.

Dave Brand had begun to entertain a tender fancy for Elie. It was she who had coaxed from him the information that he had just sold a fish location on Saturna Island, on the Canadian side of Puget

Sound. It was Elie, with her soft brown eyes and the timid touch of her little hand, who had led him to prattle on like a fatuous fool, and to reveal the fact that he had the money, in gold pieces, on his person.

Chagrin so intense that it amounted to physical nausea swept over Dave as he reviewed the incidents and the stages of his swift infatuation for Elie.

He had rowed over from Saturna Island, his dory piled high with nets and gear, with his blankets, grub, and cook stove. He had rowed the craft along the island beaches, ever alert for a location for set nets that he might file upon or buy. He had spied a cabin nestling against a bank of fern and brake. A man sat upon the tiny veranda, smoking a pipe. In the border of the bay, her skirts tucked high, a girl stood ankle deep in the water, rocking something about in a big dish pan, as a miner washes gold.

Dave had rowed in a bit nearer. The girl had looked up, had given him a nod, a bob of her head, an invitation to put in. Quite unconscious of her bare knees, she had stood in the water, rocking the dish pan about, while he rowed in and beached his dory. The man had walked down from the veranda, with a sinister, truculent look upon his face.

Already, with the swift confidence that the native Puget Sounder grants if he gives any at all, Dave had acquainted the girl with the fact that he had just sold his salmon location on Saturna for a thousand dollars, that he had the cash with him, and that he wanted to buy or locate another site. With a single glance, a touch of her hand, she had made him tell. To have done less, he felt, would have been impolite, she seemed so friendly, so glad to see him.

Why, the girl must have instantly appraised him for what he was—a thick-head-

ed fool, an easy mark! She had told him how lonely she was, how sincerely she hoped that he would find a location near by, so that he could come and see her sometimes; and Dave had believed her.

Then her father had spoken up. He had told Dave that he had a salmon location to sell cheap, that it was a good location, that he would be fishing it himself but for his rheumatism and other numerous ills. Dave noted, however, that he appeared to be as robust as a horse.

The girl, after quickly pumping the young man of what information she sought, had told him, in return, all about herself. That, Dave reasoned, had been to lull him to security in the belief that she was interested in him, that she was dealing with him frankly and ingenuously.

The big dish pan that she was rocking to and fro proved to contain a wriggling mass of sea urchins, crabs, starfish, and crawly things.

"We call 'em sea bugs," she said, poking them about with the tip of her finger. "I collect all kinds, cure 'em, and send 'em to the universities and museums. An old professor that was here three years ago started me. He showed me how, and sent me books. I make quite a lot of money by it. My dad isn't well. He can't work, and I make the living. It would be awful nice if you could find a location near, and come and see me sometimes. It gets so lonesome here! Ever been lonesome?"

Dave nodded his head. Yes, he had been lonesome.

"Let's not waste a bit of time getting acquainted," she suggested archly. "It's terrible, when you think about it, that you didn't know folks you like awful well lots sooner!"

Under the hypnotic spell of her frank smile, Dave had told her his name, whence he came, and all about the two hundred gold pieces, even letting her feel the weighty bulge of the leather sack in the side pocket of his canvas coat. Then she told Dave that her name was Elie Clallam, that she was twenty years old, that her father had been "quality" back East, where he came from, but had always had bad luck, and was sickly.

Bill Clallam, an unconvincing smirk upon his face, had arranged with Dave that after dinner—the noonday meal—he and the young stranger would go to the far end of the island, two miles distant, to look at

the set net location. Then old Bill had returned to the veranda of the cabin and lighted his pipe.

Elie, in her pride of much knowledge, had begun to explain to Dave about sea bugs.

"Look!" she exclaimed, balancing upon a rock and beckoning Dave to come and see. "That's a pink sea anemone. Isn't it beautiful? It waves its fairy arms, which are like plumes. You see what it's fast to? That pink anemone is fast to a dirty old whelk shell, and inside that whelk shell is a black hermit crab with one long, terrible claw. Now watch! Come closer. Lean down so you can see clearly. Watch!"

A jellyfish, propelling itself by opening and closing its umbrella-shaped body, drifted near, attracted by the bright color of the anemone. The claw-armed pedicle of the crab shot forth, clutched the jellyfish, and broke it into fragments.

"You see!" exclaimed Elie. "The beautiful anemone is just bait, to trick victims to come where the crab can grab 'em!"

During the noonday meal, to which Elie warmly invited Dave, the girl told her father that Dave had money—two hundred five-dollar gold pieces—and that he wished to buy a good set net location.

"I generally always take a nap after dinner," said old Bill Clallam. "I hain't what you'd call a well man. Soon as I have my nap, we'll go fetch a look at my location. It hain't but two miles from here."

As he stood in the door of the shack, staring out over the bay, Dave reflected bitterly that even this trifling delay in showing him the net location had been conceived with craft and cunning. Old Bill had wanted to give Elie further time to complete her infatuation of the blundering jellyfish.

Well, the ruse had worked. The big black crab, plying the quarry with rotten moonshine, had stolen the leather bag containing a thousand dollars. The crab had even helped himself to the dory in which the two had rowed from the Clallam cabin to view the net location. The dory was gone, and the canvas coat, and the bag of gold pieces.

For a moment the young man stood staring down the beach. With a sudden animal-like cry, he started down the sands in the direction of the Clallam cottage.

When, finally, Dave doubled a jutting point that brought the cabin into view, he

paused, lifted one big hand, and clenched it. In mid-air, as if swearing some vengeful oath, he held his fist. A distant shout had arrested his attention. The cabin door burst open, and Elie appeared. With disheveled hair flying wildly, she ran to the beach.

A canoe, manned by an Indian, doubled the promontory. Elie, wringing her hands, crying incoherently, waited at the border of the bay while the Indian paddled swiftly in. Unaware of Dave's approach, the girl continued to cry out and to beat the air with her little fists.

The Indian came in until the prow of his frail craft touched the sands. The girl said something to him in the Chinook dialect. The Indian backed his craft away, turned it, and paddled away more swiftly than before.

Dave Brand, his face very stern, stood no more than twenty feet away, watching Elie. The girl turned and caught sight of Dave. She gave a glad cry and started toward him.

"Oh, Dave! I was afraid you had drowned! Dad hasn't been able to talk. Water in his lungs! I'm afraid he's dying. I've sent for the doctor."

"Dying? Why, what happened?"

The girl gave Dave a curious look.

"You must know—the storm last night. See the windrows of seaweed along the beach. You must have heard the storm. It got dark, and neither you nor dad had come home, so I began to worry. It was midnight when the seas began to beat upon the beach. I heard a cry in the offing. I put out in my dinghy, and found him out there in the water. The dory—your dory—had swamped. I don't know how I got him in. Poor dad, he couldn't tell me what had happened, or whether you had been with him. Water in his lungs! Dave, I'm so glad to see you! Your dory is on the beach there below, half full of water and seaweed; but you're here, Dave, and I'm so glad!"

Dave stared at her dully for a moment. He reached out and took one of her hands in his.

"Anything I can do, Elie?" he asked.

She shook her head, but clutched his fingers.

"Just stay here with me, Dave. It'll be quite a while before the doctor comes."

Back and forth upon the sands they walked. Then Elie, saying that she must

look in and see how her father was, ran to the cabin. Dave walked on and stood peering down at his dory, at the net lying upon the sand, and at the roll of his sodden blankets.

He turned back to the cabin. Elie stood in the doorway.

"You didn't find anything in the dory when you first looked, did you, Elie?"

She shook her head.

"Why, Dave?" she asked.

"Nothing!"

Her face suddenly flushed, and she averted her eyes.

"You mean, did I find any of your outfit?" she amended. "I didn't. I've got to go in, Dave. Poor dad! Every breath is a torture. I wish the doctor would hurry!"

II

DAVE watched the girl as she hurried to the cabin and entered it. Then he walked on down the beach, in the direction where his dory lay, passing so close to the cabin that he could hear the labored, rattling breathing of old Bill Clallam.

Arriving where the dory lay, Dave tipped the seaweed and water out of it, carefully examining the mass of kelp and ribbon grass. He peered in under the thwarts, and even lifted the false floor. Nothing!

He unrolled his blankets and spread them upon the rocks to dry. He untangled the length of net, and shook out the sticks and stones.

A tugboat rounded the promontory, with the Indian standing on the deck. It had his canoe in tow. It put in, and the Indian and a professional-looking man went ashore in the canoe.

Dave walked up the slope of the bank and seated himself in a little clump of shrubbery. From this point he could watch the cabin.

After a time the door opened. The Indian and the doctor, assisted by Elie, appeared, bearing a blanket swathed form. Their burden was placed in the canoe, and the Indian paddled swiftly to the tug.

The tugboat man, emerging from the cabin, helped the Indian to lift the sick man to the deck. Then the Indian paddled back to shore and returned to the tug with the doctor. Elie stood upon the shore, gazing after the tug as it sped away. Dave wondered why the girl had not accompanied her father.

Elie watched the tug out of sight. Then, dejectedly, she walked back to the cabin.

Dave was just on the point of leaving his hiding place and walking to the cabin when Elie came from the door with what looked, at the distance, like a copper tea-kettle in her hand.

Carrying the kettle with care, as if it were very precious, she stepped down the slope. On the beach she looked away to the north, and then to the south. From where the girl stood, Dave reasoned, she could see the dory and the spread blankets, but she could not see him hidden in the brush. Nothing could be plainer than that Elie was reconnoitering, to determine whether any one was in sight.

Her next move proved this beyond peradventure. She laid down the copper kettle and quickly divested herself of her outer clothing. Clad only in a simple slip and her knickers, she picked up the kettle and waded into the water, which was then at lowest tidal stage.

Looking always to right and left, the girl waded out to where the water came to her armpits. Again she paused to look, and bent her head to listen. Suddenly she ducked below the surface. A few seconds later, when she popped to the surface, she no longer had the kettle in her grasp.

Slowly Elie turned her head, as she gazed back toward shore. She looked fixedly at some given place upon the bank. Then she turned to the left and studied the beach.

The explanation for this maneuver appeared perfectly plain to the watching Dave. She had planted the copper kettle on the bottom of the bay. She was now spotting landmarks up shore which would enable her, later, to return to the exact spot where she had hidden her treasure.

Still looking about her furtively, Elie waded ashore, picked up her gown, and entered the cabin.

III

FIERCE, destroying rage possessed the watcher as the door closed upon Elie Clallam. He could guess what was in that kettle!

He sternly repressed his impulse to rush from cover and denounce the girl for her perfidious treachery and her contemptible lies. He would deal with her as she had dealt with him—with craft and cunning!

Still crouched back in the shrubbery, he broke off two sticks and thrust them into

the earth in a direct line with the spot in the bay where Elie had sunk the copper kettle. With these as guides, he could wade out at some subsequent low tide and find the hiding place of the treasure as readily as the girl herself.

The tide was coming in swiftly now. Already the place where Elie had hidden the kettle was covered with six or eight feet of water. At high tide the water would be sixteen or seventeen feet deep. It would be low tide again, on the following day, about an hour later than to-day.

Meditating the fact that his hiding place in the brush was as satisfactory a vantage point as he could find for keeping in sight both the cabin and the hiding place of the treasure, Dave stepped out into the open, gathered up his blankets, which were now quite dry, and proceeded to build himself a primitive camp near the pointer sticks.

Being without food of any sort, he had recourse to an expedient that had served him more than once before when far from a supply base on some fishing excursion. He built a five-stick Indian fire and heated a flat rock. Gathering some mussels from the rocks, he placed them upon the heated stone. The shells popped open, and he devoured his simple repast with satisfaction.

Two or three times, during the operation of building camp, Elie had appeared in the cabin doorway and looked up and down the beach. While the cabin and the girl were visible to Dave, his brush screen hid him from her. Once she cupped her hands to her lips and called his name. He pretended not to hear.

To Dave, watching from his hiding place, the day was interminably long, but finally night came on. He rolled up in his blankets and fell asleep.

IV

DAVE was awake at earliest dawn. The tide was beginning to ebb, but it would be four or five hours before it would be practicable to recover the treasure kettle.

He began to meditate a fine point in his scheme of revenge. Should he wade out at low tide, recover the kettle, and let Elie see him in the act? Or should he wait, keep constant watch over the place, and snatch the treasure from her when she regained possession of it?

Dave was still considering the matter when his attention was arrested by the sight of an Indian canoe sliding into the

bay. The native beached his craft and ran up the slope toward the cabin. Elie met him halfway. Dave could see the two engage in earnest conversation. Then Elie, her head sagging dejectedly, started back to the cabin. The Indian accompanied her for a little way, bobbing his head energetically, pointing, and gesticulating.

Finally Elie entered the cabin, only to reappear within a moment. Together the girl and the Indian walked to the canoe and embarked. The native took up the paddle, and the craft shot around the promontory and out of sight.

For a long time Dave walked back and forth upon the beach. Half a dozen times he returned to his camp, sighted along the two marker sticks, and fixed in his mind the exact place where the copper kettle had been placed. He was still debating whether to take advantage of Elie's absence to recover the treasure, or to allow it to remain where it was, and to snatch the spoil from the girl's hands when she should elect to recover the stolen gold.

The tide was now pretty near at its lowest point, and still Elie had not returned. With a sudden gesture of decision, Dave waded into the water. Something might happen to thwart his scheme of revenge, if he waited. He couldn't keep watch night and day. It might be risky to wait.

Studying the location of the clump of brush where his camp was, and a distant mark that he had observed farther down the beach, he waded out. At what he thought was the right spot, he began feeling about on the sea bottom with his bare feet. It was not long before he felt the impact of the copper kettle. He ducked beneath the surface, seized the kettle, and waded swiftly ashore. When he got to the beach, he broke into a run toward his camp.

Not until he got into the shelter of the clump of brush did he pause to examine the kettle. Inside it there was something heavy. The top of the receptacle had been wired down in place, and its snout had been flattened, as if by the blow of a hammer, until only a narrow slit of an opening remained.

Again he hefted the thing. The weight within the kettle was just about the weight of the leather sack that had held two hundred gold pieces.

With thumb and finger he had begun to unwind the wire that held the lid in place, when he heard the keel of a canoe grate

upon the gravel. Dave darted a look through the brush. Elie and the Indian were landing.

Unaccountably, a feeling of guilt swept over him. He knelt, turned the kettle upside down, and thrust it in under the twisted roots of a madroña tree. A quantity of salt water and some silt seeped from the flattened end of the spout.

He plucked a handful of ferns and flung them carelessly over the kettle. Then he emerged from hiding, and busied himself over the little stone oven where he had been cooking the mussels.

From the corner of his eye Dave watched the girl and the Indian. Gravely the two shook hands. The Indian got into the canoe and paddled away.

Elie stood for a time looking after the native. Then she turned, as if to go to the cabin. She gave a sudden start. She had caught sight of Dave. She was coming slowly down the beach toward him.

Dave arose from his camp fire and shamefacedly awaited her approach.

"Poor dad couldn't make it," she said, as she came up beside him. "Even at the hospital, with a machine to pump oxygen into his lungs, he got worse. Poor dad! Seems like bad luck always followed him."

"I'm sorry," said Dave gently.

The girl began to cry, convulsive sobs shaking her little body.

"One thing my dad will have, anyway," she said fiercely. "He was quality back East, where he come from. He always said he wanted to be buried in the family lot back home, and he's going to be. It costs six hundred dollars to send him back. I signed a note at the bank. Indian Charlie, my tillicum, and his brother, Totsgi, signed with me. Indian Charlie is going to take dad back home. I'll have the money to pay the note when it's due. Providence fetched me the money to send my poor dad back home!"

Dave stood cracking the joints of his thick fingers.

"Yeah, that was lucky," he said, the grimness of his face relaxing, "you finding the money right in the dory your dad got drowned out of—my dory!"

A fresh access of grief, a paroxysm of weeping, overcame the girl. A moment longer Dave regarded her. All the bitterness had erased itself from his features now. He reached forth a timid hand, took Elie by the arm, and led her back to her cabin,

repeating over and again futile words of comfort:

"There, there! You mustn't cry so! There, there!"

Dave brought water from the spring and kindled a fire in the stove. He raided the cupboard and prepared a simple meal, ordering Elie back to the shaky lounge when she offered to help.

When the shadows began to lengthen, Dave took her hands in his and admonished her with simulated severity that she must cry no more.

"I'll see you early in the morning," he said. "Good night now. Don't cry!"

He returned to his camp.

When the light in the cabin went out, Dave lifted the copper kettle from its hiding place among the madroña roots. He pushed off the dory and paddled out silently to the place where the copper kettle had rested before. Consulting the shore landmarks, he dropped the kettle into the water. Then he rowed back to shore and hauled out the dory.

V

THE days passed. Elie Clallam, making no move to recover the treasure kettle, went about her usual work of gathering the specimens that she called sea bugs. On many of these expeditions Dave Brand accompanied her. He became familiar with many of the common varieties of mollusks, sea urchins, and starfish. He learned to use the water spy—a hollow tube with a glass in one end, a contrivance which rendered objects on the bottom startlingly clear even in twenty or twenty-five feet of water.

Indian Charlie returned and rendered to Elie an account of his journey to the East, and of the interment of her father in the tomb of his people.

The time came when the note was soon to be due at the bank. Elie, in the cabin, was marking off the days on an advertising calendar.

"I'll just about have time to get the money to pay the note," she said to Dave. "You got to go back to your camp, Dave, a little while. I'm going out into the bay to take a dive. I won't be dressed for company. You run along, Dave!"

Dave walked down the beach to his camp in the clump of shrubs. Elie appeared upon the sands, clad in her slip and knickers. She stood for a long time studying the landmarks. Then she waded out slowly,

looking back toward shore as the water deepened about her slender body.

At last she came to where the water rose nearly to her shoulders. She changed her position slightly and sank beneath the surface. She reappeared. Slightly altering the location, she drew a breath and again sank from sight. This time, when she arose and flitted the water from her face, she held the copper kettle in her grasp.

Swiftly she waded ashore. She ran to the cabin, entered, and closed the door after her.

It seemed to Dave that she remained within the cabin for an hour, or even two hours. Half a dozen times he started toward the house, only to pause and turn back.

Finally she stood in the door and called to him. Something in the tone of her voice told Dave that things had gone wrong. He hurried to her.

"I can't pay that note now," she said. "I've had a disappointment. I don't know what I'll do. It will take me a whole year to earn six hundred dollars!"

"I thought you had the money that you found in my dory hidden away in that copper kettle."

"Money?" she said blankly. "No, no! There was no money in the kettle. You don't understand. What I found in the seaweed in your dory was a baby melia. They're awful rare, full-grown. I have a standing offer of a thousand dollars for a perfect full-grown melia. This little one I found was perfect. I put it in the kettle, with a little sack of cornmeal and a stone to weight the kettle down. I wired the top on and flattened the snout, so it couldn't get out. In a few weeks, in sea water, with cornmeal for food, that baby melia would have been full grown. It's dead. Something must have happened. If a baby melia gets a shock, or is out of sea water for a little while, it dies."

For a long time Dave stood staring at the girl. The flush that had mounted to his cheeks slowly faded.

"Elie," he said, "I think we can fix up that six hundred dollars. We'll all go to the bank—you, me, and the two that signed with you. I'll sign on, too, for a new note, if they'll take me. I've been looking at that net location your father wanted to sell me. It's better than I thought it was. I'll set up my nets and fish the flood tides. I—we'll get some fish. Off times, now I

know how to work at it, I'll help you gather specimens. We may find another melia, Elie. Whether we find one or not, in a lot less than a year we'll pay back that six hundred dollars."

With grateful tears in her eyes, the girl looked up at him.

"Melia are terrible rare," she said, trying to smile.

"I know," he said. "Things worth while always are—like love. There ain't a girl north of the equator loved like you are, Elie! A fellow that loves a girl like I do you can do wonders when he makes up his mind. We'll make it easy, that six hundred dollars!"

A tender smile upon her face, she stood looking up at him.

"Dave, how many girls are there, all told, north of the equator?"

"Millions—maybe billions," he said, placing an awkward arm about her.

"Then I'm rarer than even melias! Dave, I—yes, I love you too, Dave! That's why, from the first, I wanted you to stay and get a location near by. Rarer even than melias! You know, Dave, even when I was a little girl, I liked cornmeal mush, cooked in a copper kettle that we had; so I am kind of like a melia, after all!"

VI

THE extension of the note adjusted satisfactorily, Dave and Elie took up the search for the little creature that was so rare. Day after day they searched the bays and beaches. Dave fished the high tides at the net location, and took some salmon. A few dollars rested in the cracked teapot on the pantry shelf.

"Soon as ever we find a melia," Dave

said, "we'll take a trip and get married, Elie. I hain't urged it, 'cause I kind of feel I hain't got the right till we find another melia."

Day after day the search continued, but with no result.

One morning early, Dave, returning from the net location, brought the dory to a stop in water much deeper than any they had searched. Lifting the water spy from the thwart, he lowered it into the water and studied the sea bottom.

Cautiously he moved to the end of the dory and lowered the stone anchor to the bottom. Then he removed his clothing, poised on the stern seat, and dived.

When he came popping to the surface, he had in his clutch what appeared to be a bit of dirty old canvas. He flung it into the dory and climbed in after it. Then he spread the dirty canvas on the thwart. It was a coat.

Dave turned the thing, thrust his hand into a side pocket, and withdrew a leather sack. He struck the sack down upon the boards, and it gave forth a metallic chink. He slashed it open, and poured into his palm a stream of golden coins.

Then Dave dressed, rowed swiftly across the bay, and landed before the cabin. Elie came running to the door in answer to his shout. They met in a long embrace, with Dave trying to kiss her and to tell her that he had found what would serve as well as a melia, all at the same time.

Finally he contrived to tell her of his find, and let her pour the golden coins from hand to hand. With their arms about each other they went into the cabin.

Presently they came forth, got into the dory, and rowed away.

THE SUBSTITUTE

WHAT I have lost of rapture

I profit in content;

Contentment is a bank account,

While ardor soon is spent.

The kindly sun has warmed me

For fervor I have missed;

My lips, untouched by love's caress,

Dawn's tender airs have kissed;

My bridal veil is moonlight,

The stars, my lover's eyes;

And yet my peevish, foolish heart

Wakes up at night and cries!

Nelle Richmond Eberhart

The Agamemnonian Idea

PLUG FRAZER'S EXPERIENCES AS A GREEK SCHOLAR, A LOVER,
A HUNTER OF GERMAN SUBMARINES, AND A
PURSUER OF RUM RUNNERS

By George F. Worts

PATROLLING Rum Row for smugglers had proved a monotonous and wearisome form of sport. Rain came down in gutterspout style all morning, and there was viciousness in the oily sea. The venerable schooners and barnacled tramps—floating liquor warehouses—at anchor outside the invisible line where the Atlantic ceases to be United States waters and becomes nobody's ocean, were uniformly uninspiring. Two small, drab, deeply laden motor boats, nimble with uneasy consciences, displayed terrified heels in the forenoon before our bow gun could be brought to bear upon either.

The captain of the revenue cutter reiterated that the day was prime for smuggling. This casual sea and obscuring rain would draw them out. Just wait!

Until some time after lunch, when we made our first haul, the only excitement provided was the Greek shelf in the cutter's small library. A row of Greek textbooks on board a boat enlisted in the coastwise smuggler hunt was no mean discovery. *Æschylus*, *Herodotus*, *Homer*, *Plutarch*, *Sophocles*, *Thucydides*, *Euripides*, and *Xenophon* were lovingly thumbed and dog's-eared.

Captain Riggs, when questioned, jabbed a thumb in the direction of a tall, well proportioned young man who was lounging against a six-pounder, mournfully chewing gum. His face was brightly tanned, and of the clean, decisive mold that characterizes our best Americans. His expression was animated, and his eyes were of an adventurous gray.

"He is a nut on the subject," the captain complained. "Any one would think, to listen to him, as I have done hour after hour and year after year, that there hadn't

been an original idea shoved into the world since Socrates drank hemlock. If you want my personal opinion, they let Socrates off easy. Hey, Plug!"

Lieutenant Frazer stilled his jaws and glanced amiably toward the bridge.

"This gentleman wants to know," the captain called down to him, "why you don't read something modern and worth while."

The handsome young man combined the charm of a sunny smile with the agitation of two rows of strong white teeth upon a visible wad of chewing gum, and forebore replying. I suspected a deep and beautiful friendship.

"Motor boats two points off the star-board bow, sir!" a man cried.

The capture was swift and easy. The six-pounder banged, and the gray streak halted, came about, and hove alongside. Its lone occupant boarded us and professed innocence in terms of pained amazement. He was nothing but a sight-seer, he explained, out having a look at the notorious rum fleet.

The speed boat was virtuously empty, but twenty-eight thousand dollars in large bills and several letters from Bermuda liquor dealers in the sight-seer's pockets were hard to account for, and he was detained for examination ashore. The prisoner would soon be free, the captain informed me, but twenty-eight thousand dollars of dangerous money would be kept out of circulation for a while, and the speed boat would be a useful addition to the fleet until the case was settled. In this ingenious manner the coast guard harries its powerful and slippery foes.

Lieutenant Frazer, with a crew of two men armed with rifles, boarded the prize.

They were casting off when a motor-driven yacht materialized dead ahead in the thin, lazily drifting mist which had followed the rain.

The yacht was perhaps sixty feet over all. Her hull was as white as a birthday cake, her cabins were of glossy mahogany, and her brasses were as bright as a new wedding ring. Bright pennants fluttered gayly from her short masts. Half a dozen girls were sitting about the bridge deck under a khaki awning, listening to a fox trot which floated to us, softened by fog and water, from her phonograph or radio horn.

Captain Riggs passed me his binoculars, and I examined the pretty craft. The mist lent her an air of unreality. All of the girls were smiling and seemingly unaware of our existence.

The yacht slipped into the mist.

"That's an Aggie, sir!" Lieutenant Frazer called up excitedly from the speed boat.

"Go after her!" Captain Riggs snapped.

The speed boat roared and sped in pursuit. When the mist had infolded her, Captain Riggs wanted to know if I had seen anything about the yacht to arouse my suspicions.

"Pennants flying, girls sitting around, phonograph going!" he said. "Just lathered with innocence! Well, Plug's pretty sharp, and his motto is 'explain afterward.'"

I said she had looked innocent to me. If he would pardon my nautical ignorance, just what was an Aggie?

"An Aggie," Captain Riggs explained, "is what he calls any application of the Agamemnonian idea. We used it in the war to sink submarines, Plug and I, and he applied it again to dazzle and confuse a girl he wanted to marry. Oh, he goes back to those ancient Greeks for all his ideas! You'd be surprised."

I murmured that the connection between ancient Greeks and a dashing young sailor courting a girl seemed a pretty far hail.

Captain Riggs graciously accepted the thirty-minute cigar I placed in his hand.

"Plug tells me that it began with the siege of Troy," he said.

II

FOR ten years, as Plug Frazer had repeatedly confided to Captain Riggs, the Greeks under Agamemnon besieged Troy. Then they constructed a gigantic wooden

horse, filled its belly with Greek soldiers, pushed it to the city gates, and left it standing there for the Trojans to ponder upon. That evening the Trojans, consumed with curiosity, opened the gates and dragged the strange animal into the city. At dead of night the hidden Greeks rushed out, and the siege was at an end.

Plug Frazer had traced the Agamemnonian idea through history with loving care. Not to go back beyond the last century, he cited the case of Stephen Decatur at Tripoli, in 1804. The American frigate Philadelphia had been captured by the piratical Moors, and lay anchored in the harbor. Decatur filled a ketch, captured from the Moors, with American bluejackets disguised as natives and armed with pikes and pistols, snaked her alongside of the Philadelphia, and set the frigate afire, so that the enemy could not use her against him—thus insuring his subsequent victory in the Tripoli campaign.

Frazer's next instance was Joshua Barney, an American sailor who first won distinction in the Revolutionary War. In 1812 Barney secured letters of marque, disguised a heavily armed privateer as an innocent merchantman, sailed up to one British ship after another, and easily captured them.

One hundred and two years after that, the German raider Emden steamed into Penang with a dummy extra funnel and other embellishments, blew up the Russian cruiser Jemtschug, sank the French destroyer Mosquet, and escaped with a clean pair of heels.

And one evening about three years later, as he sat in his darkening office in the State, War and Navy Building, in Washington, Lieutenant Commander Riggs looked up from certain confidential matters on his desk to find that a caller was standing beside his chair in an attitude erect and respectful.

Now Lieutenant Commander Riggs had always had a very fair memory for faces and names, and the recollections stirred by his visitor's Grecian nose were pleasant.

The intruder was a tall, well proportioned young man in the attire of the first mate of a coaster, which consisted of a faded blue flannel shirt, a suit of coarse blue serge, and a seagoing cap without any gold.

"I was sent to you, sir," Lieutenant Frazer said in a respectful voice. "Do you

remember me? You were a line officer on instruction duty at the Academy while I was there."

Lieutenant Commander Riggs nodded.

"They called you Plug. You were heavyweight champion in your plebe year. I understand you've been serving on a British Q boat, and are ready to tell me how to go about it. Well?"

"I've found just the ship we want, sir," the young man said eagerly. "She's an old-timer—the Catalfa. She's two hundred feet over all—eighty beam—about three thousand tons. Well decks are fore and aft, with the bridge amidships. She's been lying in the Erie Basin for a good many years."

"Hull in good condition?"

"I found only a little bilge water, sir."

"Engine?"

"An old steeple compound, but in fair condition. All metal parts were well larded with white lead and tallow. Valve connections to the sea were packed in sawdust and burlaped, to prevent freezing. I opened one of the four single-ended Scotch boilers—not nearly as dirty as I had expected. Somebody had put pans of lime under the ash pits, to draw off the moisture. The last people who sailed in her must have been fond of the old hooker, I imagine. She's a fine little ship to-day, in spite of all her rust."

"Did you look up her owners?"

"Yes, sir—Blight & Hardway. Only three of the original drawings were obtainable—a 'midships section, a profile, and a plan of the bottoms."

"Water-tight bulkheads?"

"Yes, sir; and the engine room and fire-room are well divided."

Lieutenant Commander Riggs stood.

"I'm going to leave the reconstruction in your hands. I will inform the commandant at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and he will designate a naval constructor. I won't expect to hear from you until you are ready to sail."

Plug Frazer returned to the Erie Basin with orders to put the Catalfa in dry dock. When the water was pumped out of the dock, she was a disheartening sight. Great areas of black paint had peeled and popped away from her sides, and rust had grown there as fungus grows in a damp forest. Her shrouds drooped in "Irish pennants," and the woodwork was cracked and worm-eaten. Her old black anchor was draped

with seaweed. Sea grass hung down from the bottom of her hull in a vast green beard, and barnacles had grown there by the million.

Brisk and critical inspectors came to appraise the hull. They scraped until shiny metal was reached, bored holes, gauged thicknesses; and it was found that the Catalfa, underneath the grass, barnacles, and rust, was sound—sound enough.

Swarms of workmen made their appearance. Riggers and mechanics fashioned an engine that would perform. Boiler makers patched together metal that would hold a high head of steam. Shipwrights and calkers provided a hull that would keep the ocean on the side where it belonged.

Twelve days after she had gone into dock, the Catalfa was floating again.

To conceal the guns that were to be mounted in her well decks, the sides were built up with steel plate, thus creating a streamline appearance from stem to stern. In each of these four false bulwarks two oblong openings were cut for gun ports. Hinged shutters were fitted so nicely into the openings that they could not be detected sixty feet away.

These shutters were to be held shut by ingenious catches which would be controlled electrically from the bridge. The throwing of a single electric switch would release the catches on all eight shutters, allowing them to drop outward and down so that the guns would be hidden until almost the instant of firing.

Painters gave the new steel a quick rusting treatment, applying salt water and brownish black paint alternately. The decks behind the false bulwarks were prepared for gun mounts. They were strengthened underneath with steel girders, while on the deck an inch of steel was overlaid and riveted down. Upon these plates were bolted the gun platforms of seasoned white pine.

All the larger accessible bottoms, and as much of the bilges as could be utilized, were filled with block cork. The freight decks and cargo holds were piled high with light lumber. All ports and port lights were covered with steel disks.

With the cork and light lumber in place, and with the steel blanks riveted and calked over the open ports, a torpedo striking the Catalfa would tear a large hole in her outer skin and a smaller hole through the inner skin; but the cork in the double bottoms

and bilges, the light lumber in the cargo holds, and the buoyancy of the unflooded parts of the ship, would keep her afloat for a long while—long enough to reach port, if the engine was not disabled.

A week before the engine was given a dock test, Plug Frazer went to the naval receiving ship and picked his crew. His first selections were those men wearing the most "hash marks," or service stripes. When ten dozen men and a dozen and a half petty officers were assembled, he gave them an order dear to the heart of every bluejacket—to get out their dungarees and wear them thereafter; to stow away their whites, and to forget that safety razors and barbers existed.

A heavy Atlantic mist was moving sluggishly across Erie Basin when the Catalpa had her dock trial. Shortly after dark her villainous-looking crew began to come aboard. Lieutenant Commander Riggs, commanding officer of the expedition, wore a shabby brown suit of civilian clothes. A razor had not touched his face for at least three days.

The Catalpa sneaked out at night, unescorted. Loping along at her easiest sea gait, the resurrected banana boat finally steamed into the submarine zone. By daybreak the next morning, the first American mystery ship was about one hundred miles southwest of Cape Clear.

III

PLUG FRAZER and Riggs were smoking after breakfast corncobs when the sun came up and showed them their first customer. Lounging against a davit, Riggs was listening philosophically to certain pungent observations of Xenophon on the proper training of a commander. In the well decks, fore and aft of them, the gun crews were idling by their five-inch rifles, with ammunition broken out.

The decks were rolling gently, the rigging sang sweetly in a freshening head breeze, and the eastern horizon was clear and pink.

There was hard excitement in the voice of the lookout in the crow's nest:

"Periscope on starboard bow, sir!"

As the bows commenced swinging to leeward, Plug Frazer hastened to the starboard rail and leaned outward, with his right hand shading his eyes against the glow of sunrise. At first he could discern nothing on that vast bosom of green water.

Having swung about thirty degrees from her original course, the merchantman now presented her beam to the submarine.

Riggs pushed the handle of the engine-room telegraph to the word "stop," and gave an order to the man at the wheel. An answering bell tinkled. The measured clanking belowdecks slowed, stopped. The Catalpa drifted in silence.

"Steady as you go, sir!" the man at the wheel said huskily.

Over the glassy wave tops the two officers caught occasional glimpses of a thin upright tube that stood motionless on the water about three-quarters of a mile away. It might have been a fishing stake.

"Wake of a torpedo close aboard, sir," Plug uttered mechanically, gazing at the approaching streak as if fascinated.

He turned and leaped. The next instant he was sprawling on the deck. The air was thundering. A foaming column of water flopped back to the sea, and a black slick area spread outward from the wound. White fumes of a nitrous odor were tossed upward by the breeze.

"Frazer, take charge of the panic party," the lieutenant commander directed, crawling on hands and knees into the pilot house, in order not to be seen from the deck of the U boat.

The speaking tube whistle from the engine room was shrilling.

"Boson's mate—on deck all the panic party!" Plug ordered.

"On deck all the panic party! Bear a hand!" barked the boatswain's mate, who had been waiting at his station in the fore-castle passageway.

Over the speaking tube the chief was reporting that the bulkheads were holding, but that several of the forward bottoms appeared to be full of water. Bilges between the first and second bulkheads were flooded. The Catalpa was perceptibly down by the head, and still settling.

The panic party had been carefully rehearsed, for it was the hub upon which the success of the mystery ship revolved. It was as important as the fascinating decorations on the flanks of Agamemnon's wooden horse. Only part of the crew was used—the number that ordinarily forms the crew of a tramp steamer. The others remained concealed.

Waving their arms and shouting, the panic party poured out of the fore-castle. They ran up and down and across the deck,

simulating panic. They fell down. They fought among themselves. They attempted to lower a boat.

One of the men leaped overboard. Others swarmed up to the bridge deck, fighting to reach the boats. A second unsuccessful attempt was made to lower away. The falls became tangled. Several men got into a fight of their own. Another man leaped overboard.

After a long while two boats were lowered away in exceedingly bad order. The panic party scrambled over the side like rats. In haste and confusion, the two boatloads of shouting survivors pulled away, stopping only long enough to pick up the two men who had jumped overboard.

Riggs, crouching behind the bridge screen, gave orders to cast loose all starboard guns and provide ammunition.

Plug Frazer, at the tiller of the foremost boat, observed with interest that the submarine's second periscope was showing. The U boat began to move. At a safe distance she maneuvered in a complete circle about the Catalpa, and stopped again near her former position, but only about a half mile away. She was in an awash condition, and the hatch of her conning tower was opening.

A little less than a mile away, with his men displaying the worst possible oarsmanship, Plug Frazer contemplated first the shining strip of gray, then the Catalpa. The success of the entire scheme depended upon the enemy's gullibility. First the submarine commander shot his torpedo, then he became curious, wondering why his victim did not sink. Finally he approached to within comfortable shelling range.

The submarine's crew crawled out on deck. Long guns slid into sight from hatches. These were trained leisurely upon the obstinate steamer.

For some time there was no sign of life aboard the Catalpa. She lay perfectly still, a thin spar of smoke rising from her chubbly funnel.

The guns of the submarine were swinging into position.

The crews of the Catalpa's two small boats were resting on their oars, muttering with impatience.

A chorus of thin shouts went up from the panic party. All four steel shutters on the starboard side of the Catalpa had dropped down. Four gaunt gray muzzles seemed to spring from the ports. Simul-

taneously a quartet of brilliant orange flames licked out. Haloes of reddish brown fumes drifted rapidly to leeward.

Snowy puffs expanded over the submarine. The reports of the guns and the shell explosions followed in sharp blasts.

A layer of milk-white smoke was spreading over the spot where the submarine had last been seen. It poured off, running over the sea like a fuming liquid. A shower of metal spattered to the surface. Only a shattered stump remained of the conning tower. Both periscopes had been wiped away. The deck guns had vanished. Not a German was visible!

The U boat was settling rapidly at the stern, because U boats were stern heavy. Her bows rose up, foaming. Shouts, howls, and boisterous back-thumpings were indulged in by the panic party.

Plug Frazer stopped grinning, and the fingers on his stubble paused. He had seen the two forward guns of the Catalpa fire again, and he could only guess how many torpedoes were confined in the bow of the submarine—perhaps four in the racks, perhaps two or three in the tubes—somewhere between one and two thousand pounds of trinitrotoluol less than one mile away!

"Open your mouths! Roll back your tongues!" he shouted.

It was only in his imagination that he could have seen one of the shells wipe off the submarine's bows. Where there had only been a gray, nude stump, suddenly—miraculously—an enormous white cloud blossomed. It soared upward and outward in a mighty billow. Furl upon furl it rose, taking form like a gigantic white chrysanthemum. A mass of water, a lump of immeasurable size and weight, was plucked into the air and fell back.

Plug Frazer found himself in the bottom of his boat. He had heard no explosion. It was an enormity, beyond the register of any eardrum. It had knocked him from his seat as if he had been struck by a violently moving mass. He was conscious of a vast convulsion, an irresistible thrust of wind, but no sound.

But the sound of it was sent to him now in tremendous blasts, as the detonations echoed in terrific thunders from the clouds. The noises traveled in great leaps, it seemed, down the whole length of the ocean. These echoings became gruntings, then chattering; but the noise persisted in Plug's head. It was world-filling.

He gave the order to head into the coming wave. It curled at them in ominous silence, then gathered with a low roar—not one, but a series of combers.

Acres of dirty oil moved outward from the spot where the submarine had gone down. Small wreckage was coming to the surface here and there. The Catalpa suddenly came into view through the pearly fog, like a ship carved upon chalk. The entire western horizon floated upon creamy mist.

Plug steered his boat across the oil slick, stopping to pick up a torn life belt. This was evidence for Washington, as the United States Navy had adopted the British custom of demanding more substantial evidence of a defeated tin fish than a bottled mixture of sea water and oil.

Some one at the whistle cord of the Catalpa was jerking out a series of victorious toots. Plug brought his boats alongside.

IV

"ACCORDING to Plug," said Captain Riggs, throwing the butt of his cigar away, "that was the most faithful duplication of the Agamemnonian idea given to the world since the Trojans dragged the wooden horse inside the walls of their city. Of course, I've seen a few neat applications since Plug and I were transferred to the coast guard. Off Montauk Point last week—"

"You started out," I broke in, "to tell me how Plug Frazer went back to the ancient Greeks to dazzle and confuse a girl he wanted to marry."

"I was just coming to that part," said Captain Riggs. "He had been in love with a girl who lived near the Brooklyn Navy Yard, and she wouldn't listen to Plug's line of reasoning. The fact that he was a war hero didn't soften her at all. He grew thin and hollow-eyed thinking up ideas. He went back to the Greeks time after time. Every spare minute on the Catalpa he was digging into those books; and the day we sank that submarine, the idea came to him. When he came aboard with the panic party,

just as the boson's mate was rigging up the collision mat over the hole the torpedo had made, the idea struck him. It was funny that it hadn't struck him sooner."

"Aggie!" I gasped.

Captain Riggs gravely nodded.

"When the Catalpa returned to port, Plug went to the nearest naval hospital, where a friend of his was a surgeon. Plug explained what he wanted, and the surgeon did him up artistically. He wrapped Plug in bandages from head to foot, and lent him a pair of crutches. Then Plug went to call on the girl. It was a cowardly thing to do, walking in like that on an innocent, unsuspecting girl, pretending he was all shot to pieces and likely to die at any moment, but Plug was just headstrong enough to go through with it. The girl burst into tears at sight of him. 'Will you marry me?' said Plug; and what could any good-hearted girl do? They were married that afternoon. 'Explain afterward' is Plug's motto. It took yards of explanation, but she forgave him. They have two sons—Agamemnon and Sophocles."

"Two boats three points off the port bow, sir!" the lookout interrupted. "It's that yacht and Lieutenant Frazer's boat, sir."

Captain Riggs signaled the engine room for slow speed, and maneuvered the revenue cutter until the speed boat and the yacht were squarely abeam, no more than fifty feet away.

The pennants were still flying gayly, and the half dozen pretty girls were still seated about the bridge deck, smiling and seemingly unaware of our existence.

Plug Frazer came aboard with the dejected owner and the frightened engineer of the yacht a few minutes later. He was grinning triumphantly.

"I told you she was an Aggie!" he said. "There's fifteen hundred cases of Scotch stowed away in the forward and after cabins. They were jettisoning it as fast as they could when I overhauled them. Those girls are wax models!"

THE QUEST OF HAPPINESS

I HAVE sought happiness down far ways with yearning—
Vainly have sought it under distant skies;
Then, from my weary wanderings returning,
I have beheld it in Love's welcoming eyes.

Clinton Scollard

The Doukhobor Woman

THE ROMANCE OF A MAN AND A GIRL WHO CAME FROM
TWO DIFFERENT WORLDS

By Horace Howard Herr

HERMAN MANWELL, a protégé of a rich banker named Bradherdt, flees from New York under a cloud and finds refuge in a Doukhobor settlement in the Canadian Northwest. Ekatrina Sherbinin, a girl of this strange colony of Russian peasants, saves him from drowning in Swan River. Manwell and she take each other for husband and wife in the way of the Doukhobors, who use no marriage ceremony, and the fugitive becomes a member of the community. In his flight he brought with him a belt containing several thousand dollars, but the money has no value among a brotherhood holding all property in common, and the belt lies disregarded on Father Sherbinin's window sill.

One day a stranger—a detective—arrives at the settlement in quest of Manwell. Father Sherbinin, with a Doukhobor's instinctive hostility to all agents of the law, tells him that the man he seeks is dead. The sleuth goes away, taking the belt and its contents; but he makes no report of finding the money, which he uses to establish a detective agency in Chicago.

Manwell is content with the simple life of the Doukhobor community, but Ekatrina longs to see the outer world. She finally induces her husband to take her to Chicago, where they find quarters in a shabby rooming house on Dearborn Street, and Herman gets employment at a neighboring freight house. Chance brings them in contact with a prominent lawyer, Colonel Meadows, who is cared for by Ekatrina after being hurt in an automobile accident on Dearborn Street; and through the colonel they meet Mrs. Ferre, a broker's wife, and Captain Traymore, head of the city detective bureau. Ekatrina recognizes Traymore as the man who came to the Doukhobor settlement in quest of Manwell.

Anxious to give his wife something better than her present surroundings, Manwell, who has literary tastes, devotes his nights to writing a book. He overtaxes his strength, and, just as he finishes his manuscript, he breaks down and is taken to the city hospital. Captain Traymore, who happens to be at the hospital as the patient is brought in, promises to help Ekatrina.

XV

AT nine o'clock next morning Captain Traymore stopped his car at the curb before Mrs. Getz's rooming house on Dearborn Street. He had not had time to get out of it when Ekatrina, having rushed pell-mell down two flights of stairs, was at the door.

"I thought you did not remember to come for me," she said, as Traymore helped her into the car. "Do you think my Herman will be much better?"

"They will take good care of him," Traymore replied. "We will stop on the way and get some flowers for him."

"To get there quickly will be much better than waiting for the flowers."

"It will take only a minute."

"But it has been so long since the morning came that Herman will be afraid I am not coming."

Traymore did not press the matter, but took her directly to the hospital. Having escorted her to Manwell's ward, the officer took the nurse aside, to find out just how matters stood with the patient. He was informed that Manwell was suffering from a well developed case of typhoid fever, and there was evidence suggesting that the patient had been under a serious mental and physical strain.

"Really, Captain Traymore, the woman ought not to remain in the room very long. Nurses are expected to have no opinions of their own on these cases, but experience tells me that this man is pretty sick, and my guess is that he'll be worse before he gets better."

Traymore walked to the end of the corridor, where from a window he looked down into the street. For some time he remained there; and if some one had challenged him to reveal his thoughts, and he

had complied truthfully, he would have admitted that he was rather pleased with the prospect.

When a man has tasted of power and comparative affluence, he is not disposed calmly to contemplate the possibility of being deprived of them. The drug addict will go to almost any extreme—he will resort to theft and murder—to obtain that which he craves.

As long as this Russian peasant woman was in Chicago, she jeopardized Traymore's standing and reputation. He was not so cruel as to desire to harm her, or to see her suffer. If he could get her back to her remote Canadian village with no likelihood of her returning, he would be quite satisfied. As he looked into the snowy slush of the street, he was thinking that if Manwell died, it would probably be a very easy matter to get the woman away.

To the mind of this champion of the law, this man who had hounded down at least a dozen murderers, there came the thought that it might be prudent to make it easy for Manwell to die. He turned the proposition over in his mind, much as he might have turned over the facts of a crime for which he was endeavoring to build a theory.

He reminded himself that nine out of ten criminals are caught because they fail to keep their own counsel. Accomplices, a friend, a pal, a woman—some one knew, and the knowledge proved the undoing of the culprit. To make it easy for Manwell to die involved an intrigue with nurses, or internes, or doctors. That would not do. It was too much like surrendering to a lion in order to be rid of a lamb; yet it would simplify matters exceedingly if Manwell's illness proved fatal.

Presently Traymore went back to the room and persuaded Ekaterina that she would be endangering her husband's life if she remained with him too long.

On the way back to Mrs. Getz's rooming house, the detective again endeavored to question Ekaterina about her people and her village. With leading questions he tried to learn something about the woman herself. When he made no appreciable progress, he became silent and thoughtful. He began to consider the eventualities if Manwell recovered. How then would he dispose of this woman, or effectively seal her lips?

Was she, after all, as simple and innocent as she appeared? She was a striking wom-

an, of superb physical development. It was quite evident that she thought a great deal of her bearded husband; and yet, if one could find a way to compromise her in some fashion—it would be difficult, perhaps, but if Manwell was ill, and there was no money, it might be possible. There is no telling what a woman will do when she is desperate.

When the car had arrived at the curb in front of Mrs. Getz's place, Traymore helped Ekaterina to the sidewalk and accompanied her to the third-floor rooms. He urged her to tell him what he could do to be of service to her. Had she enough money, he asked?

Ekaterina insisted that there was nothing the captain could do except to return for her again the next morning. Then she asked anxiously:

"Do you think my Herman is to be well very quick?"

Simulating a fatherly concern, lest she should subject herself to unnecessary worry, Traymore patted her shoulder with his heavy hand.

"You mustn't worry, dear child," he told her. "Your husband is a sick man, but we are going to see that he is well cared for, and you must permit me to see you through. If you need anything, you must tell me. I'm going to watch out for you until your man is well again."

"Nothing matters for me until I have my Herman again," said Ekaterina, with an earnestness which impressed and vexed Traymore.

Many times that day the chief of detectives found himself neglecting his work at headquarters. His mind refused to concentrate on the papers on his desk. In spite of him, it would flit away into rather somber speculations. Would it be protection to him to compromise this woman? Was she, after all, what she pretended to be—a simple, innocent peasant girl? Was there a chance that she was only a kept woman? If only he could "get something on her," in the technical phrase—something that he could hold over her, so as to drive her back to her people with a threat of jail!

Traymore realized that the woman was hostile to him. He knew that it would take time to establish himself in her confidence, and yet self-protection dictated the advisability of working fast.

That afternoon Traymore found time to drive up the North Shore to a modern man-

sion just above Lincoln Park. He had decided that perhaps a woman could serve him, and he was calling on Mrs. Ferre.

He knew through Colonel Meadows that Mrs. Ferre had taken an interest in the Manwell woman; and although he felt sure that this interest was more a fawning to the colonel than a sincere concern in the Russian girl, he believed that he could flatter the lady into helping him.

"I thought you might be interested in knowing that trouble has overtaken those Russians the colonel discovered," Traymore began, when Mrs. Ferre and he were seated in the back parlor. "The man has been taken to the hospital, and the woman is alone in that miserable rooming house. For some reason she doesn't take to me, and some one ought to know something about her connections. Colonel Meadows, as you know, is in the South, and I'm wondering if it would be asking too much—"

"Why, of course not, captain!" Mrs. Ferre interrupted. "The dear, simple-minded child! I'll drop in and see how she's getting on."

"You will spare the colonel's feelings, I'm sure, Mrs. Ferre, but sometimes I'm afraid that he is playing with fire when he takes up with such foreigners. They live in a bad district, you know, and birds of a feather flock together."

"How like you, captain—always looking out for your friends! To tell you the truth, I've had the same feeling about it. I even told the colonel so a few days before he went away."

"He's such a royal old cavalier that we mustn't let him get into a mess. If you'd just look in on the woman, I'm sure she'd talk to you. You know that any one is likely to be unusually frank and confidential when worried."

Mrs. Ferre made her visit the next day, arriving at the house on Dearborn Street just after Ekaterina had returned from the hospital. Her Herman was very sick. Mr. Traymore had just brought her back from the sick room, and he had said it would be many days before Herman would be home again.

Mrs. Ferre was all sympathy, and Ekaterina needed sympathy. The money was nearly gone, and Mrs. Getz had taken the precaution of warning her not to expect to remain in the rooms without paying the rent in advance. To be sure, there were many, many pages of paper with writing

on them which Herman had intended to sell and get money enough to move into one of those pretty houses by the lake; but where and how did one sell paper with writing on it?

Mrs. Ferre not only listened sympathetically, but asked questions sympathetically. She would take the papers with the writing on them, and see where they could be sold.

"Herman has told me to take very good care of them," Ekaterina explained, "because they—"

"Yes, indeed, we must take very, very good care of them. I shall take them home with me and look over them. To-morrow, perhaps, I can tell you where they can be sold. Now tell me, dear child; tell me something about your husband. You know I never have seen him."

How does flattery lead us to ruin! Ekaterina's limited English could not do justice to her Herman.

Mrs. Ferre went home very well satisfied with her visit, and anticipating further interesting diversion in the many, many pieces of paper covered with writing—the pieces of paper in which rested Ekaterina's hope of arrival in that wonderful world where bowing gallants pressed to their lips the hands of their beautiful women.

XVI

WHEN she reached her home, Mrs. Ferre was informed by her maid that Mr. Ferre had telephoned to tell her that Colonel Meadows had returned to the city, and had invited them to dine with him at the Blackstone. Her husband and the colonel would meet her in the hotel at eight o'clock.

The irritations of a hasty toilet were lost in the pleasurable anticipation of being able to give the colonel some interesting news of the Doukhobor woman. He would be surprised to learn that her husband was not a Russian. The fact that the colonel had not discovered this gave Mrs. Ferre a thrill of delight. He was such an uncanny person in ferreting out things that it was great fun to discover a detail he had missed.

Moreover, he would be interested to know that some Doukhobor marriages have the benefit of neither the clergy nor the law, and that Mr. and Mrs. Manwell's wedding ceremony would scarcely commend itself to conventional society. Mrs. Ferre was ready to agree with the colonel—a point they had frequently disputed—that

the woman entertained an extraordinary affection for her husband, although Mrs. Ferre herself could not see any attraction in a big, bewhiskered man, such as Manwell had been pictured to her.

But the bit of news in which Mrs. Ferre found her greatest zest was in the story Ekatrina had told her about the pieces of paper with writing on them. That the woman should firmly believe these scribbled sheets were destined to open the doors of a new world for her savored of nursery naïveté. It was like a child's implicit belief in the possibility of cruising to the moon on the back of a goblin, or astride a broomstick.

The manuscript would probably be amusing, unless it turned out to be one of those crazy castigations of persons who had acquired wealth. What could a bewhiskered man, living in a place like Mrs. Getz's rooming house and working in a freight depot, write? What did such persons think about? In all probability there would be grime and sweat, and the smell of cabbage and steaming washtubs, in literature born in a tenement; but it would be interesting.

To-morrow morning Mrs. Ferre would remain in her room, in comfortable negligence, and look over the manuscript. It was to be hoped that the man wrote a fairly legible hand—an unreasonable hope, of course, because writing must be a strange exercise for hands accustomed to handling barrels and boxes.

When her maid had finished with the coiffure, and was laying out a dinner gown of brocaded silver cloth, Mrs. Ferre took time to reassure herself that the manuscript was reasonably legible. Removing the heavy brown wrapper, she found the written sheets further protected by a pasteboard box. She lifted the lid, removed a blank piece of paper, and found herself looking at a page on which were half a dozen lines in a masculine chirography of singular strength and beauty. This was indeed a surprise!

For a moment Mrs. Ferre looked at these written lines with absorbed interest. As she lifted the title-page, so that the first full page of the manuscript came into view, the maid, chancing to glance at her mistress, observed that the lady's lips were pursed, and that there was a suggestion of muscular contraction about her eyes. Experience had taught the girl the significance

of these facial signs. Mrs. Ferre was in an uncertain temper, as likely to be extremely gracious as to be unwarrantedly critical. These symptoms of a queasy mood did not prevent the maid from reminding *madame* that there was occasion for haste.

Mrs. Ferre put the manuscript back in the box, laid it on the spinet desk, and resumed the business of dressing for her dinner engagement. She offered neither suggestion nor criticism as the maid ministered to her. If she appeared altogether lovely two hours later, as she walked into the Blackstone dining room on the arm of the distinguished Colonel Meadows, some of the credit might properly have been given to the efficient little woman who served her.

Mr. Ferre and the colonel were discussing the probable effect on general business conditions of the advent of a Democratic administration in Washington. The Democratic bias of the South, innate in the colonel, had been tempered by the impartial attitude of the jurist and softened by the insight of the philosopher, but he remained partisan enough to be quite sure that the election of Woodrow Wilson would not prove fatal to national prosperity.

Mr. Ferre was a Hamiltonian Republican, a bond broker, and an ardent champion of the divine right of unrestricted private initiative in business. Nothing in life was impersonal to him. He was the type of man who makes himself the center of the cosmos he builds. Business and bag games, for Mr. Ferre, were matters of partisanship. He was no more philosophic than a market quotation or a cash register. There always was an argument when he and Colonel Meadows dined together.

The argument had gone no further than the right of government to interfere with the business activities of the citizen, and the dinner had progressed only to the Swedish *timbales* with chicken and mushrooms, when Mrs. Ferre, weary of meaningless political chatter, interrupted.

"If you two men will quit quarreling," she said, "I'll give you news of that Doukhobor woman."

"By all means, Mrs. Ferre!" the colonel exclaimed. "Henri always appeals his cases when I beat him, so we couldn't reach a final decision. Tell me about Ekatrina and her man. They are well?"

"Quite the contrary, colonel. The man is in the hospital, seriously ill with typhoid fever, and the woman is almost frantic."

"Distressing!" the colonel exclaimed, with real anxiety in his tone. "I can imagine how terrible it must all seem to the woman, when she finds it so hard to understand our ways. To which hospital was he taken?"

"The City Hospital, over on the West Side. Captain Traymore is keeping an eye on them."

"Good for Traymore! After the way he has lectured me on the folly of having anything to do with these Russians, I'm surprised that he should take an interest in them."

The colonel chuckled as if he thoroughly enjoyed this bit of human inconsistency.

"Traymore is a shrewd fellow," Mr. Ferre volunteered, "and he knows foreigners. If he advises you to keep away from them, you can rest assured that he has a reason."

"They are not really married, you know."

Mrs. Ferre tossed off the remark indifferently, she thought, but the colonel did not miss the pitch of excitement in her voice.

"No, I did not know that," he admitted; "and indeed I'm very sure in my own mind that neither Manwell nor his wife is that sort."

"But the woman told me about it this very afternoon, colonel," Mrs. Ferre insisted. "There was no minister, not even a justice of the peace. They just 'took each other,' she said. Not that it matters much, because it is very evident that the woman is very much in love with her man."

"They're in a questionable district, and that sort of thing shouldn't be encouraged, even if it is silently tolerated," remarked Mr. Ferre, who always defended the established conventions.

"Environment often dictates the social code, and marriage forms are almost a matter of geography," said the colonel. "African savages steal or buy their wives. A Turkish wedding differs from a Chinese one, and they all differ from anything known to the white race. I should say that if they observed the conventions of their people, we're not justified in questioning the legitimacy of their marriage."

"I stand with Traymore," declared Mr. Ferre, with conviction. "Such people are a menace to our institutions!"

"And I'm not at all sure that the man is a Russian," added Mrs. Ferre. "Certainly he wasn't born in the religious sect

that produced the woman. She told me this afternoon that he was not one of her people in the beginning. Moreover, the man thinks he can write. He has written ever so many pages."

"That is interesting!" the colonel exclaimed. "Leave it to a woman to find out all these things," he added, smiling at Mr. Ferre.

"Now what do you imagine a man like that would write about?" Mrs. Ferre asked, with a little sarcasm in her tone.

"Probably he's one of those Russian anarchists doing propaganda work in this country," Mr. Ferre suggested. "Traymore never goes wrong on such people. He seems to know them by the scent, as a setter knows a quail."

"I've suspected that the man wasn't a Russian," said the colonel. "The first time I met him, I was impressed with his superior intelligence. It wouldn't surprise me to discover him writing on astronomy, or metaphysics, or any subject. It would be interesting to read that manuscript, wouldn't it?"

"You shall have the opportunity, colonel, for I have it at home." Mrs. Ferre found a decided thrill in this declaration.

"I got it this afternoon. That simple woman believes that what her husband has written will make them rich. She doesn't know what it is about, she can't read it, but he told her that he would sell the manuscript for enough money to get them into society. Of course, that isn't the way the woman tells it, but that is what she means."

"It would be extremely interesting to see those two in society," Colonel Meadows reflected.

"Now, colonel, I don't see why! They'd make a vulgar mess of it, and embarrass themselves and every one else. What could be interesting in that?"

"Henri, you haven't seen either of them," Colonel Meadows replied. "They are remarkable characters—the wife particularly so. Imagine a woman who has no conception of the meaning of money—"

"It would be more difficult to imagine one who had," Mr. Ferre interrupted.

"Henri," his wife exclaimed in mock indignation, "that isn't nice!"

"Mind you, I didn't say the *value* of money," the colonel resumed. "I said the meaning of it—its social significance. It seems quite impossible for her to grasp our notions of private property. She's a

strange woman, Henri, and I dare say you'd be quite taken with her if you saw her in a dinner gown. If ever you are fortunate enough to have her as a partner, I warrant she'll keep you interested!"

"I'm becoming rather curious about her bewhiskered husband," Mrs. Ferre admitted. "Do you think it possible that he might write something really interesting?"

"Most assuredly! But haven't you read the manuscript?"

"No, colonel. When I got home with it, I had no time to spare. I like to look my very best when I dine with you, and, believe me, it takes quite some time and effort to make me look my best!"

"What can I say to that, Henri?" the colonel asked. "If I were a Doukhobor, telling the simple truth, it would be easy—"

"Well, she ought to be able to stand the simple truth occasionally," Henri Ferre interrupted.

"Then I would have to say that she must be using more and more time and effort, because each time I see her she has improved her looks, even though the previous sight of her convinced me that there was room for no improvement."

"Tut, tut!" Mrs. Ferre exclaimed. "That's your Georgian flattery! At any rate, dressing for dinner is quite too serious a business to permit me to divert my attention from it to reading a manuscript."

"Are the pages hand-written or typed?" Mr. Ferre asked.

"Hand-written, and in a very clear and creditable hand, too," Mrs. Ferre replied.

For some reason not apparent to the observing colonel, she seemed to lose interest in the subject. During the remainder of the dinner she was unusually silent, abstaining from her usual protests when the colonel and her husband went back to their political discussion.

While Mr. and Mrs. Ferre and Colonel Meadows were enjoying the best that a famous cuisine could produce, Captain Traymore was feeding on the hard crust of impatience in his office at police headquarters. Early in the evening he had called the hospital, and his inquiry had elicited the fact that Manwell was holding his own. If there had been any change since the morning, it was for the better; but of course the disease had not reached the crisis, and a temporary improvement meant little. The report aroused no enthusiasm in the chief of detectives.

At half past eight Traymore telephoned to Mrs. Ferre's residence. When the butler answered the call, the detective said that if it was altogether convenient, he would like to talk to Mrs. Ferre. Knowing Captain Traymore as an intimate friend of the household, the butler told him that Mr. and Mrs. Ferre were dining at the Blackstone with Colonel Meadows. Yes, he was quite sure it was Colonel Meadows.

This information put Traymore in a nasty humor. He paced his office for a few minutes, occasionally exclaiming in words more profane than coherent. Shortly after nine o'clock he had his car brought to the curb. As he climbed in, he told his chauffeur to drive to the Blackstone.

Arriving there, he assured himself that the colonel and his guests were in the dining room, then dismissed his car, and dropped into a seat from which he could watch the dining room entrance. It was, therefore, something more than chance that brought Traymore and the diners together when the latter were coming into the lobby.

"Well, well, what luck!" Colonel Meadows exclaimed, when he caught sight of Traymore. "You are too late for dinner, and just in time to take me home. How are you, captain?"

"Fine, colonel. And you?"

"Never felt better in my life, and—"

"He is getting younger and better-looking every day, isn't he, captain?" Mrs. Ferre interrupted, as she extended her hand to Traymore.

"And more hopelessly a Democrat!" Mr. Ferre added.

"He'll need his youth if he goes home with me, because I can't get in touch with my chauffeur."

"How fortunate that we met you!" Mrs. Ferre exclaimed. "We'll see you home, captain. Henri has the roadster, and I came down in the big car."

"Thanks! You are more than kind, Mrs. Ferre."

As they were walking to the door, Colonel Meadows said:

"If Henri will agree, I would like to drive over to Dearborn Street and see the Doukhobor woman. Traymore, you ride out with Mrs. Ferre, and we'll be coming along in a few minutes. What do you say, Henri?"

"Why, I suppose I might as well see the woman one time as another, though it seems an unconventional hour to call."

"I just wish you wouldn't go," Traymore said, with some earnestness. "You will—"

The colonel held up his hand.

"No more of that foolishness, Traymore! I'll have Henri along to protect my good name, and I'll only stay a minute—just long enough to show her that I'm interested in how they are getting on."

Despite Traymore's objections it was agreed that Henri Ferre and the colonel, using the roadster, should drive to the old rooming house, while Mrs. Ferre took Traymore to her house in the big car. Later, a chauffeur would take the colonel and the chief of detectives to their respective homes. The arrangement had but one redeeming feature, in Traymore's opinion—it gave him an opportunity to ascertain what, if anything, Mrs. Ferre had found out during the afternoon.

When Henri pulled up at the curb in front of Mrs. Getz's rooming house, Colonel Meadows insisted that his friend should accompany him to the third floor rooms. Mr. Ferre consented reluctantly, and the colonel led the way up the dingy stairs. He knocked on the front room door.

There was no answer, and he knocked a second time. He heard a noise as if some one were getting out of bed, and then the snap of the electric button turning on the lights.

A moment later the door was opened by Ekatrina. She was in her nightgown, and had not thrown even a shawl about her shoulders. Her eyes were suspiciously red, and she stood staring for a moment, as if she found it difficult to believe what she saw.

"You'll forgive me, I know, for coming up so late at night," the colonel began.

He got no further. Reassured by the sound of his voice, Ekatrina, her voice low and breaking just a little, like that of a child on the verge of tears, threw her arms about him.

"Christ is good to me at last!" she exclaimed. "It is Mr. Colonel!"

She gave him a tremendous hug, and then, as if to make sure that it was not a dream, she took his face between her hands and looked intently into his eyes.

Mr. Ferre had witnessed the scene. At first he thought of bolting. It was a most unconventional reception, and it suggested that Traymore knew very well what he was talking about.

Colonel Meadows took Ekatrina's hands in his own, and for a full moment stood looking into her face.

"Come!" he said, as he led her toward the bed. "Get back into bed before you take cold."

"It is no matter, Mr. Colonel, if I take cold. My Herman is so much sick, and the Mrs. Getz says it is for me to get out, because there is no money. I told her we are to have a great deal of money when the papers Herman has made writing on are sold, but she only laughs at me. Christ is not risen in her, or the Spirit would tell her that it is not for a woman to go into the street because there is no money when her Herman is in the hospital!"

The words came in torrents, and behind the words were tears.

"Get into the bed, cover your feet, and worry no more about Mrs. Getz. See, I have brought with me Mr. Ferre, the husband of your friend, and we shall see that there is all the money needed. I have heard about Mr. Manwell's writing, and I am going to buy what he has written."

"But you do not need papers which have been written, because you also can write your own," Ekatrina protested wonderingly, as she sat down on the bed and swung her feet up under the covers.

"Yes, I will buy them. I am sure I cannot write as Mr. Manwell does. Mrs. Ferre told me about the manuscript, and I am going to her house to get it. I will pay whatever it is worth."

"Manwell said it would bring much money, and he will get well, and we will get away from Mrs. Getz, and I shall have, Herman says, a dress like the so pretty one of Mrs. Ferre's!"

"Yes, you shall have that and more," the colonel assured her, as he pulled out his wallet. "Here is a part—just a little of the money for the manuscript. There will be more when I read it and see what it is worth. In the morning you will pay Mrs. Getz, and to-morrow I will see what can be done for Herman. If there is anything you want, you must tell me when I come to-morrow."

"It is as Herman said it would be, and as I have prayed for, Mr. Colonel. You are the hands of Christ!"

A few minutes later Mr. Ferre and the colonel climbed into the roadster.

"What a strange woman!" Ferre remarked, and these four words were the

only ones spoken until the two men arrived at the Ferre mansion.

For fifteen minutes before their arrival Traymore and Mrs. Ferre had been fencing for possession of the Manwell manuscript. As soon as the detective knew that there was such a thing, he was determined to get possession of it at once.

There was something about the handwriting which made Mrs. Ferre equally determined to retain the written sheets in her possession. She had brought them to the library for Traymore to see, and he had cautiously attempted to persuade her to permit him to take them. Mrs. Ferre had begun to suspect that Traymore had some hidden interest in them, and Traymore sensed the fact that she was determined to retain them, when her husband and Colonel Meadows entered.

"Ah, I see you have the manuscript!" the colonel exclaimed. "I have bought it, and I'm going to read it this very night."

XVII

TRAYMORE, although he would have been willing to give its weight in gold for Manwell's manuscript, could find no excuse free from suspicion for insisting that he should be permitted to take it. Mrs. Ferre, a most resourceful woman, insistently urged that since she had given her word to Ekatrina, she ought not to surrender it, but must fulfill her promise to return it in the morning.

This argument availed her nothing, for Colonel Meadows called Mr. Ferre to witness that Ekatrina had sold the manuscript, and that the colonel had sealed the bargain with a substantial payment.

Despite the poise which Mrs. Ferre always maintained, Colonel Meadows did not miss the suggestion of chagrin in the woman's demeanor when he insisted on taking the package with him when the chauffeur brought up the big car in which he was to take Traymore and the colonel home.

When the car drew up at the curb in front of the apartment house in North Avenue, the detective got out with the colonel.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I'll go up and chat with you a minute. If you would rather get off to bed, just say so."

"Come right along," the colonel replied cordially.

"It was mighty decent of you, Traymore, to have an eye on those Russians," the attorney began, once the two men were in his apartment. "I don't deny that I

have grown fond of that strange young woman, and I wouldn't feel right if she had to suffer preventable hardships."

"Damned foolishness!" Traymore sputtered. "I knew you would never forgive me if I didn't do my best for them; but just because I've looked in on them, don't get the notion that I approve of your mixing up with them, or that I've changed my mind about them."

"Suppose you are right, Traymore, what can happen to an old fossil like me?"

"They could ruin you so easily and quickly that it would make your head swim, and—"

"No, no—nothing to that! Really now, Traymore, why don't you like them? Are you the victim of some freak complex, or do you know something about them?"

"I wanted to spare your feelings, colonel, but you've asked a question, and I must assume that you want a straight answer. To begin with, the woman is just a common, ordinary kept creature—"

Colonel Meadows held up his hand.

"No more of that sort of stuff, Traymore! Not another word! There is not a cleaner, purer, more unsophisticated woman in this city than that Doukhobor girl. I excuse your remark, because I am sure you have carelessly interpreted something that Mrs. Ferre said. She told me this evening that the Manwells were not married; but when I questioned her, she wasn't so sure about it. There are marriage ceremonies of many kinds, you know, and I'm willing to gamble like a gentleman on the proposition that every convention known to these Russians was scrupulously observed."

"All right—have it your way, colonel! I'll not quarrel with you about a couple of worthless foreigners. I'll promise even to refrain from saying 'I told you so' when you find that they have pulled the wool over your eyes and the coin from your pocket. Of course you were joking when you said that you had purchased that junk."

Traymore nodded contemptuously toward the bundle of paper on the table.

"Quite the contrary," the colonel replied, as he dropped into a big chair. "I don't much care whether the manuscript amounts to anything or not. I've been trying to devise a way to place money at the disposal of these people, and it provides the opportunity."

"Oh, I see—a disguise for your philanthropy! That's different, I suppose. It is your money, and you can give it away if you want to. I'm curious about the man's attempt to write. You won't mind, I'm sure, if I take the manuscript."

"After I read it, you may," replied the colonel. "And now you have made me curious to know why you are curious."

"I've seen two pages of that paper, and no Russian could have written what I read. It is my business to be watching out for crooks."

"And it is my business to be watching out for the best interests of my clients."

There was a hint of warning in the colonel's voice, and Traymore realized that he had gone far enough. He adroitly changed the subject to the colonel's Southern trip. A few minutes later he departed, simulating his usual good humor as he promised to see that a car was provided for Ekaterina's daily visits to the hospital.

As soon as Traymore was gone, the colonel got into his long outing flannel nightgown—he was an unregenerated rebel when it came to pyjamas—settled himself in bed, with the reading lamp and the manuscript on the stand near the head of his bed, took up several sheets from the package, and began to read.

The firm, well rounded letters, as legible as so much type, gave him a pleasant surprise. Presently that surprise lost itself in wonder, and this in turn yielded to an intense interest—the sort that drives one on and on, without reckoning time or place, inviting, alluring, until one comes to the end, spent and exhausted, and simultaneously relieved and regretful that the end has come.

Colonel Meadows finished the last sheet of the manuscript, and slowly gathered the other pages from the little stand. He tapped an end and then a side of the mass, to force the sheets into an orderly pile, and replaced them on the stand. He leaned over them and reread the title-page:

THE LIVING DEAD

WHERE THE COLD BARS OF CIRCUMSTANCE EXILE ONE FROM ASPIRATION AND HOPE, A SOUL DIES WHILE IT LIVES, AND, LIVING, IT IS DEAD. GOD'S MERCY FOR ONE WHO ARRIVES IN THIS SOMBER REALM WHERE DESPAIR CASTS A PERPETUAL GLOOM!

Colonel Meadows pulled the little chain on his reading lamp. The glow of the electric illumination faded, and the room was

dark, save for the wraithlike moonlight which came in at the windows. He eased himself down on his pillow, and presently was asleep.

When Captain Traymore left Colonel Meadows's apartment, the chief of detectives was in a desperate mood. During the few minutes he had talked with Mrs. Ferre he had experienced extreme elation, and then the most profound misgivings. His shrewd questions had satisfied him that the Doukhobor woman had told Mrs. Ferre nothing that would lead her to suspect that Traymore had visited the settlement in Canada.

In reporting the results of her afternoon with Ekaterina, Mrs. Ferre naturally stressed the developments which impressed her as interesting—the unconventional phase of their marriage, the fact that the man was not a Russian, and the more astonishing fact that Ekaterina seemed to know very little about his past history.

While Mrs. Ferre enlarged on this latter phase of the case, Traymore suddenly became thoughtful. He did not conceal his abstraction. With the suddenness of panic, the conviction came home to him that this man was the Bradherdt embezzler! This man knew that approximately twenty-five thousand dollars had been taken from Father Sherbinin's window ledge! Ekaterina and her husband—if husband he was—could destroy the powerful chief of detectives. True, the process would incriminate Manwell, but it would show up Traymore as a traitor and a thief.

"You are not listening, captain!" Mrs. Ferre chided. "I dare say it is all very commonplace to you, but you asked me to find out what I could."

"And I'm a thousand times obliged to you, Mrs. Ferre," replied Traymore, with forced enthusiasm. "It is very interesting. Everything you have told me confirms my suspicion that they are not the sort that deserve favors from respectable people. It is positively dangerous for Colonel Meadows and your generous self to have anything to do with them. Human scum may be interesting at times, but it remains just scum, and it soils whatever it comes into contact with."

"Of course you're right, captain. You understand that I've only tolerated the woman because of the colonel's unusual interest in her."

"I understand perfectly. It is charac-

teristic of you to be considerate of your friends without a thought for yourself."

"Now, captain!" Mrs. Ferre exclaimed.

"That's true, and you know it is," the detective continued. "You didn't hesitate to call on the woman this afternoon, just because I thought you could help me out. I would feel terribly guilty if your contact with these foreigners got you into the least embarrassment or difficulty. I beg of you to have nothing more to do with them."

"But I haven't told you, have I, about the man's foolish notion that he is to write himself to wealth? Just imagine! He has written a great mass of—of I don't know just what. I got the manuscript from the woman this afternoon."

Again Traymore became panicky. What if the man had written the story of the belt and the money?

"And you haven't read it?" he asked, his lips dry and his voice forced.

"Just glanced at a page or two," Mrs. Ferre replied. "I'm saving that treat"—she emphasized the word, to be sure that Traymore did not miss her sarcasm—"until I'm in bed and ready for sleep. I imagine it will be a sleep producer!"

"Please, Mrs. Ferre, permit me to take the manuscript for the night. I'll return it in the morning, as early as you desire."

"But I've promised that Doukhobor woman to return it in the morning," replied Mrs. Ferre. "I'm afraid, captain, that I'll have to deny you the distinction of being the first to read it. You may have a look at it, if you wish."

She went to her room, to fetch the package from her spinet desk. She had scarcely returned to the library, and removed the heavy wrapping paper from the bundle of written sheets, when Colonel Meadows and Mr. Ferre appeared on the scene. The colonel announced his purchase of the manuscript. Quite unlike his usual indulgent courtesy toward women, he insisted on taking possession of it at once.

On leaving Colonel Meadows, Traymore walked westward on North Avenue until he reached Clark Street, where he hailed a taxicab. Telling the chauffeur to drive to headquarters, the chief of detectives settled back in the darkness of the cab, to consider what, if anything, he could do to protect himself. Swearing over his two failures to get possession of Manwell's manuscript gave him neither relief from chagrin nor a plan of action.

A guilty conscience is an infallible sleuth. It interprets every objective move and episode in terms of subjective possibilities. Seeing a policeman rapidly approaching, the thief immediately imagines himself arrested. Knowing that he was guilty of having appropriated to his own use a large sum of money which did not belong to him, and knowing, too, that Manwell had knowledge of the disappearance of the money from Father Sherbinin's window ledge, and that Ekatrina had seen him in the Doukhobor village, Traymore imagined that the one thing Manwell would write must be a statement of these facts.

For some time the chief of detectives suffered all the agony and humiliation of an exposure of his crime. He saw himself shorn of power, ostracized from the upper circles of society, even called on to answer before the law for the theft of the money. As the taxicab rolled by the turreted waterworks building at the intersection of Michigan Boulevard and Chicago Avenue, Traymore, perhaps for the first time in his life, shuddered and thought of the heavy walls of the penitentiary.

This shudder brought him to his senses. He realized that he must get hold of himself, and must bring to bear on his own defense that peculiar talent which made him effective in solving mysteries of crime. If one could construct a crime from scant clues, and from a knowledge of human impulses and mental reactions, one could construct something that would effectively hide a crime. Presently Traymore, the man, yielded to Traymore, the detective; and the latter approached the problems of the former with shrewd, impersonal thinking.

If Herman Manwell was the man who had embezzled the Bradherdt funds, did he know that Traymore was the man who had visited the Doukhobor village and received from Father Sherbinin the money belt and its contents? That was the first question Traymore asked himself.

He did not know that Ekatrina was Sherbinin's daughter. He had not seen Manwell in the village. Knowing nothing of Doukhobor character, he assumed that his visit to the settlement must have been the subject of gossip.

He was sure that Ekatrina had recognized him that night when he took Colonel Meadows and Mr. and Mrs. Manwell to the colonel's apartment. He was sure it was because of that recognition that the

woman had so suddenly bolted. If she knew that he had called at Sherbinin's house, and had departed with the money, it was probable that she had told her husband; for it was very evident that Ekaterina was deeply in love with her man.

There—it flashed into his mind as had many a crime theory that proved to be correct—was Traymore's salvation! Ekaterina would be willing to do almost anything, if she were convinced that her action would save her husband. She was a simple-minded woman; she knew almost nothing about police methods, or what could or could not be done with her husband. If Traymore frightened her with the belief that her man was to be sent to prison, very likely she could easily be persuaded to demand that he should return with her to the village in Swan River valley. After all, it would be an advantage to Traymore if Manwell really was the man who had been mixed up in the Bradherdt affair.

By the time Traymore had arrived at this conclusion, the taxicab had drawn up to the curb at headquarters.

"I'll be here about five minutes, and then I'm going to the City Hospital. You may wait, if you like, or, if you would rather, I'll release you and call another cab," he explained to the driver.

"I'll be glad to wait, sir. Fares are rather few and far between at this hour," the driver replied.

Traymore sauntered into his office. It was a matter of comment throughout the department that the big chief was apt to show up at any hour of the day or night. That was one of the ways Traymore kept his men on the job.

Sergeant Martin, a gray-haired veteran, was in charge of the office at night. To the sergeant's greeting Traymore replied with his usual gruff brevity, and then, as if it were the thing uppermost in his mind, he asked:

"Small and McCarthy reported anything new on the Bradley killing?"

"Nothing new, sir. They are watching that Bartlet moll, and they've staked out a couple of stool pigeons in the Wilson Avenue district."

"If they pull anything before I show up in the morning, see to it that nothing leaks out to the pressroom. This is once that we want to have all the ammunition before we shoot."

"Yes, sir," the sergeant replied, and went about his business.

Traymore went to his desk, and unlocked and pushed back the roll-top. He pulled out one of the bottom drawers and took out a file. He started through the papers with some care, and finally came to one on which appeared, in large type:

FIVE THOUSAND DOLLARS REWARD

Beneath this line was the picture of a rather striking young man. Below it, in small type, was an extended description of the man for whose arrest the reward was being offered, together with the information that he was wanted in connection with embezzlements reported by the Bradherdt National Bank of New York.

Traymore folded this paper and placed it in his coat pocket. He closed his desk, and leisurely made his way from his office to the waiting taxicab. Fifteen minutes later he was entering the City Hospital.

On the third floor, at the desk, he found the nurse in charge of that floor for the night.

"How's our patient in No. 311?" he asked.

"He seems to be holding his own, Captain Traymore. I believe he is sleeping now."

"Fine!" Traymore exclaimed. "I'll just stick my head in at the door."

He approached the room almost noiselessly, and cautiously peeked in. Manwell was asleep. Traymore moved quietly into the room, and stood beside the bed, looking down at the sleeping man, for several moments. Carefully he pulled from his pocket the circular he had taken from his office file. He looked at the picture on it, and then looked again at the face before him on the pillow.

Noiselessly he retreated from the room. The muscles of his face were set. He did not speak to the head nurse as he passed by the desk on his way to the stairs. He had cleared up one uncertainty in the case. He knew who Herman Manwell was!

XVIII

WHEN Colonel Meadows awoke the next morning, a March gale was sweeping in from Lake Michigan. For a few minutes he listened to the querulous whine of the wind at his windows, and congratulated himself on the warmth of his bed and his comfortable environment.

As he became older, these moments of self-congratulation came to the colonel with increasing frequency. He realized that he

was a fortunate man. While he made no display of his wealth, he had all that was essential to his comfort. His apartment was a study in simplicity. Simplicity may be very expensive when it is done in genuine Circassian walnut, ebony and ivory, Persian carpets and rare Turkish rugs.

There was one reason why the colonel's satisfaction with his measure of material success would never deteriorate into selfish conceit. This complacent mood never came to him without bringing with it a very real and very keen regret that the adorable creature who had been his inspiration and comfort in the lean years of endeavor and stern self-denial was not present to share the enjoyment of his affluence. The memory of his dead wife was ever with him, and it would not permit him to put too high an appraisal on the fame and fortune which had delayed until it was too late to serve either as a compensation for her loyalty and unselfishness or as a medium of expression for the profound love the colonel bore her.

It was, perhaps, the sting of this recollection which aroused the colonel from the comfortable languor of his somnolent dalliance. He swung his rather lean legs from under the covers, sat for a moment on the edge of the bed, and looked steadfastly at the little golden oval on the reading table, from which an age-dimmed picture of a beautiful woman's face returned his gaze.

Presently a bored smile crept over the colonel's face, and, as he made his way to the bathroom, he began to hum the air of "Dixie," going flat on the higher notes, and resorting to a whistle on the highest. He had scarcely turned on the water in the bathtub when the man who served him as butler and *valet de chambre* appeared in the bedroom.

"Ah, good morning, Breckinridge!" the colonel exclaimed, as he poked his head around the bathroom door. "Sounds as if it might be rather wild outside."

"It's very raw, Colonel Meadows, and there's an edge of sleet on the wind. What will you wear this morning?"

An expression of perplexity clouded the colonel's face, and a hand went to his little tuft of beard.

"When we lived in Atlanta I didn't have to answer that fool question every morning," he said rather solemnly. "Just clothes, Breckinridge—just common warm clothes!"

The colonel went back to his bath, and Breckinridge, with a quizzical smile on his face, went about the task of laying out "just clothes" from an overcrowded wardrobe. When a gray Scottish tweed business suit and clean linen had been placed conveniently for the colonel, Breckinridge took a suit of underwear to the bathroom door.

"Ah, thanks!" the colonel grunted, without stopping his vigorous rubbing with a heavy bath towel. "You've had breakfast, of course?"

"Quite some time ago, colonel."

"I hope you left something, Breckinridge! I have an enormous appetite this morning. Did you leave plenty for me?"

"Mrs. Breckinridge always sees to it that there's plenty left for you, colonel."

"How many biscuits did you leave, Breckinridge?"

"More than I ate," the servant replied with an easy chuckle.

"As many as six?" the colonel asked. "You know I ate six the last breakfast I had at home, and I wasn't half as ravenous as I am right this minute!"

"A fresh pan of them went into the oven as I came in," Breckinridge explained. "They'll be smoking hot by the time you get dressed."

"Well, perhaps a panful is enough," the colonel said, a little dubiously, "if there are grits and eggs and bacon to make out with."

"One would think they hadn't fed you right well while you were gone, colonel. Things must be much changed from what I knew them, if a man has to come home from the South to feed up!"

"Oh, I fed well enough, Breckinridge, but hotel foods don't have the taste. I'd starve to death if it wasn't for Mrs. Breckinridge. Did the Whartons move while I was away?"

"Yes, colonel—they got out just a few days ago. It has been rather quiet on this floor since they moved."

"There are four rooms in the vacant apartment?"

"Yes, colonel—four rooms, besides a reception hall and a very large bathroom."

"And it's furnished, even to bed linen?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, Breckinridge, if we rented it, we could pick our neighbors. Would you be good enough to see Rossman right away, and ask him if he'll let me have a lease on it for six months?"

"Of course, colonel; but we really don't need it, and the rent is quite an item."

"I'm afraid I'm going to have some company. I'll know by this evening. If he hasn't rented the place, I'm sure Rossman will hold it for us until to-night. You see, Breckinridge, we aren't fixed to take care of a man and his wife, if they decide to remain with us for the spring. I'll be obliged to you if you'll look after it for me."

Ten minutes later Colonel Meadows was delighting Mrs. Breckinridge by the zest with which he attacked the biscuits and honey and the grits, and by his account of his Southern trip.

As Breckinridge was more than butler and valet to the colonel, so was Mrs. Breckinridge more than housekeeper and cook. She was his adviser extraordinary in all matters touching on things feminine. The colonel had told her much about the Doukhobor woman; and while she thought it was an unwarranted risk for the colonel to remain in one of those dingy boarding houses when he was injured, she had responded sympathetically to his accounts of this strange, simple creature.

"And do you know, Mrs. Breckinridge," the colonel said, as he finished the sixth biscuit, "our Doukhobor woman has been having her troubles while I was gone?"

"No, you-all don't mean it!" Mrs. Breckinridge exclaimed. "Nothing really serious, I hope, sir?"

"Real trouble this time, Mrs. Breckinridge. Her husband is in the hospital with typhoid fever."

"And the poor child knowing so little about our ways, and with so few friends!" Mrs. Breckinridge's sympathetic nature was easily aroused. "If you-all thought I could do any good, colonel, I'd surely be able to find time to look in on the dear woman."

"Now that's just like you, Mrs. Breckinridge. You know I'm powerfully fond of that couple, and I feel as if it is my duty to look out for them. I want to ask you, Mrs. Breckinridge, do you think it would be—well, just the thing—if I rented that four-room apartment across the hall, and brought the woman up here until her husband is well? You know, it's rather inconvenient to be running down to that dirty rooming house every day."

For Mrs. Breckinridge life held many uncertainties and problems about which she entertained grave and lasting doubts; but

of these the infallibility of Colonel Meadows was not one. Whatever the colonel did was right. To have him intimate that he had contemplated something that might have in it an element of impropriety aroused her.

"Why wouldn't it be just the thing?" she asked, her demeanor showing very plainly that she simply dared any one to answer her. "If the poor child was right here, we could take care of her without the least trouble; but it would be rather expensive, colonel."

"I know, I know!" the colonel said sagely; "but I'll charge it up as conscience money."

"Huh!" Mrs. Breckinridge interrupted. "If there's one man in this world who needn't think of conscience money—"

"Now be careful! You are prejudiced."

"No, I just know you-all. You-all sleep powerfully sound, colonel, and they do say that's a sign of a clear conscience."

"Well, I rather imposed on those poor people when I had my accident. I just imposed on them because I wanted to be amused; and now I'd feel better about it, you know, if I brought the woman up here, where we can see to it that she is well taken care of."

"You-all just tote her right up here, colonel, and then don't worry. I'll see that the dear child gets the proper care!"

"That's just like you, Mrs. Breckinridge!" the colonel exclaimed. "I just wish I dared to eat that other biscuit!"

Before Colonel Meadows had his car brought to the *porte cochère*, Breckinridge had reported to him that the four-room apartment had not been leased, and that Rossman was willing to hold it reserved for the day, until he heard further from the colonel. He seemed in such unusual good humor when he went down to the car that Mr. Breckinridge asserted, and Mrs. Breckinridge agreed, that his Southern trip had been very beneficial to the colonel.

It was mid morning when the car stopped in front of the dingy old rooming house, and the colonel mounted the stairs to the third floor. He was at the door, with his hand lifted to knock, when voices within caused him to hesitate.

"We put them in jail, and we keep them there," a heavy voice was saying—a voice that sounded very much like Traymore's.

There was a period of silence, and then the voice began again:

"I'm trying to be your friend, but I can't answer for what may happen if you remain here. You know your husband stole that money, and I know it, so why try to cover it up? You do know he stole it, don't you?"

There was no doubt but that was the voice of the domineering, bullying chief of detectives. A flame of fury flared in Colonel Meadows's soul. His first impulse was to open the door, and only with an effort did he restrain himself and continue his eavesdropping.

"It is not for me to know about the money, because I listen only to the Spirit. My people have nothing to do with what a man has been before Christ is risen in him."

"No—you can't get away with that line of talk with me!" the heavy voice interrupted. "You are no fool, and you knew what this man was before you went to living with him. He's a thief, and we put thieves in jail. If it comes to that, where is your marriage license?"

"What is it, this license? Is it yet something that my Herman has done?"

That was Ekatrina's voice, and it had a break in it, as if she were near to tears.

"What have you to show that you and this man were married?" the heavy voice demanded.

"To show?" Ekatrina questioned in turn. "Oh, I have Herman to show—he is my husband! Why, you have seen for yourself that we live together, and it is not done except for those who are married!"

"Isn't it?" The sarcasm in Traymore's words fed the flame of fury in the colonel's soul. "Well, just think it over. It's against the law to live with a man, unless you can prove that you are married to him. It looks as if you stand a good chance to go to jail along with your man. What do you say to that?"

"It cannot be to put my Herman in jail, when he is so sick! If it is some one must be put in jail, then I will go, and you will take care of my Herman until he is well. The money is nothing. It was on my father's window for so long a time until you came and got it."

"Never mind about that!" the heavy voice interrupted sharply. "The thing for you to do is to keep your mouth shut until your husband is well enough to travel, and then both of you get back to Canada. I'll see that you have money to get you back. If you remain here, you'll both go to jail,

and they'll send you over for the limit. Have you told any one that you saw me in your home town?"

"The Spirit told me to keep quiet. It told me to be afraid of you the first time I saw you. It told me never to say anything, not even to my Herman."

"Listen, woman, don't try to put over anything on me, because you can't get away with it! Do you mean to say that you haven't told your husband you saw me in your town? Do you mean that he doesn't know I was the man who called and got that money belt?"

"He did not know the money was gone until my father told him," said Ekatrina. "How could he know you, when he did not see you, and I did not tell him, and my father talks to no one of such things? It is like that with my people. When Christ is risen, the Evil One is dead, and should be forgotten. The evil man was drowned in the river."

"What do you mean by that? Your father stalled me with that sort of bunk! Who was drowned in the river?"

"The man who came to the ford with the money, and walked into the deep water. He was drowned, and is to be forgotten. It was my Herman I pulled out of the river. He had nothing to do with the Evil One and his money."

"Ah, I see, I see!" the heavy voice drawled. "Pretty smooth, that sort of talk! Well, I fell for it once, but never again! Now I've given you a line on just how matters stand. Shave that beard off your man, and he's the chap who double-crossed old man Bradherdt. Why, they'd send him to jail for the rest of his natural life! I'm willing to help both of you out of the country if you'll keep your mouth shut and beat it just as soon as your man can travel. What do you say?"

"It is to do anything that my Herman does not go to the jail, where they kill men with a rope. No, no—that is like in Russia, as my father has told me. Please, it is not to do that, and—"

Ekatrina's voice broke, and Colonel Meadows's hand closed over the door knob. He was in the very act of stepping into the room, when the woman, her voice showing her elation, exclaimed:

"But there is some better way—it is to give back the money! My Herman, he has done writing on so many pages, and he said they would bring us many moneys, and the

good Mr. Colonel is ready to buy them. I do not want the pretty dresses, if the money is to keep my Herman away from that jail! Now it will be all right for us, and you will not have to send us back. Is it not like that?"

"Listen, woman! I'm too old a bird at this game to believe you are the fool you—"

Traymore stopped. The door leading from the hall had opened, and Colonel Meadows stood framed in it.

"No gentleman, Traymore, calls a good woman a fool!"

Traymore's face, which but a moment before had been red with angry determination, lost its color. The clenched fist he had been holding in front of Ekatrina opened nervelessly, and his hand dropped to his side. In the second of silence which ensued, the powerful chief of detectives saw himself disgraced, ruined, and ostracized.

Ekatrina jumped up from the chair on which she had been seated, stood for a moment in astonishment, and then rushed around the end of the bed and into the colonel's arms.

"I have been praying the good Christ to let you come, and you are here! It is not—it cannot be—that they would put my dear Herman—my poor, sick Herman—in the jail, where they kill men with a rope on their neck!"

The woman's words had been broken with sobs, and the tears streamed down her cheeks. Colonel Meadows held her in his arms, and, shaking his head as a denial of such a possibility as she pictured, smiled reassuringly.

"Jails are for those who are bad, and we know that your Herman is a good man," he said tenderly. "Don't you worry about it for another second, because we are going to show Captain Traymore where he is wrong. Come, girl—sit down!"

As he led Ekatrina to a chair, the colonel addressed himself to Traymore.

"There was a time, captain, when I would have demanded satisfaction from my own brother, had I heard him browbeating a woman in that fashion; but age and experience work strange changes in our natures. I read a most remarkable book last night—the manuscript that you were so determined to get into your possession. I'm just wondering if that manuscript didn't save a life! Perhaps, if I hadn't read it, and if it wasn't fresh in my mind,

I would have tried to kill you when I came into this room. Funny, isn't it, how things work out?"

The colonel actually smiled at Traymore, who stood sullenly defiant in his silence.

"Have a chair, Traymore, and make yourself comfortable, because we'll have to get together on this proposition before any of us leave the room. We've been friends for several years now, and we know each other pretty well. I think you'll do me the honor to take my words at their face value, without discounting them one iota. If anybody goes to jail, we may all go together. Do sit down, Traymore!"

Traymore took the chair that Ekatrina had vacated when she rushed to the colonel's sheltering arms. He sat on the edge of it, ill at ease. Beads of perspiration were popping out on his forehead. He knew that he was confronting a crisis of the sort that makes or breaks men. He knew that he had the most skillful and the most powerful lawyer in Chicago to deal with. He sensed the fact that the colonel was not looking for information, for he already knew all that was essential and relevant to the case.

"Now," Colonel Meadows, resumed, smiling at Ekatrina, "suppose Manwell did embezzle that money, and suppose, Traymore, that you did take it from that village, what of it?"

Traymore got out a handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. His tongue passed over his lips, as if he intended to speak, but no words came forth. The colonel walked toward the door, sinking his hands into his pockets. He turned and walked back to the middle of the room, and, standing there, with his head thrown back, his goatee protruding at a saucy angle, and his eyes fixed on the smoky ceiling of the room, he quoted:

"Where the cold bars of circumstance exile one from aspiration and hope, a soul dies while it lives, and, living, it is dead. God's mercy for one who arrives in this somber realm where despair casts a perpetual gloom!"

"That, Traymore," he explained, "is the preface to that remarkable manuscript. I'm going to take you home and have you read it. All of us have done things we bitterly repent. If four persons—a man and his wife, a detective, and a meddling old fossil of a lawyer—forget the dead past and live in the future, there's no reason why any one should go to jail!"

"I don't understand you, Colonel Meadows," Traymore said thickly.

"Well, when the evil man is dead, that's the end of him. Two evil men have died. May they rest in peace! We'll forget them. Dead men tell no tales, and if the living forget the dead, then, of course, there will be no gossip about them."

"And if Christ is risen in a man, why should the long time ago make a difference!" Ekaterina interjected, her eyes shining, as if she were laboring under some extraordinary excitement and exaltation.

"Yes, if Christ is risen in a man," the colonel said slowly, as if there were something about the words and in the sentiment which was unfamiliar and awkward, "why should the long time ago make a difference. Traymore, a person who would let the long time ago make a difference would deserve—why, he would deserve to go to jail, and I'd be willing to see that he went there and remained."

Traymore knew that he should say something. His lips moved, but no words came from them. He mopped the perspiration from his face. He saw the colonel standing there, smiling down on him. Finally he stammered:

"I've made a—a terrible mistake and—"

There was a knock on the door. Captain Traymore did not finish the confession that was on his lips. The colonel turned and called out:

"Come in!"

The door opened slowly, and Mrs. Ferre, a striking and beautiful picture in her furs, her cheeks flushed from contact with the biting wind, and her face lit up with a gracious smile, entered the room.

XIX

TRAYMORE'S heart missed a beat when he realized that Mrs. Ferre had been at the door. Beneath that lady's gracious manner was the avatar of banal envy. The broker's wife had an almost incredible propensity for being cruelly kind, and an uncanny penchant for saying the nicest things in the most damaging way.

There were those in her social world who believed themselves to be very intimate friends of the clever Mrs. Ferre. In so far as their feelings and inclinations were concerned, they were; but it is doubtful if Mrs. Ferre ever took any one of them to her heart in an intimate and unreserved friendship.

When she married Henri Ferre, he was looked upon as one with an assured future. By those who spoke authoritatively on such matters, he was pictured as a young man of exceptional business ability.

"Young Ferre will be immensely wealthy some day," was the verdict of those who believed they knew the formula for financial success.

Mrs. Ferre married a brilliant prospect which did not fully materialize. Ferre was a success, he was rich, but he fell short of the sensational achievements which had been prophesied for him.

Mrs. Ferre had inherited a substantial fortune, which she was very careful to keep under her own control; but this, added to her husband's money, considerable as was the aggregate, totaled a rather mediocre figure in a social circle notable for such names as Field, Armour, Palmer, McCormick, and others popularly accepted as synonymous for the fabulous wealth of the new industrialism.

Mrs. Ferre was not a grimalkin, spitting and clawing at whoever came near her. She was a young woman, beautiful, accomplished, and, when the occasion required, very charming. It was only the keen observer who detected in her a certain malice toward life, a profound cynicism in contemplating the accomplishments of others, and an intangible attitude approximating jealousy toward those who were more fortunately circumstanced than she was.

With those who had come to be the social oracles of the world in which she moved, she was cordial even to fawning, and with these she was popular. The lesser lights in her social firmament did not attract her, and she consciously refrained from trying to attract them, if she did not aggressively repel them.

Traymore, the social anomaly, openly sponsored by no one, and yet willingly tolerated by all, was aided in maintaining his position in society by his ability to analyze people. For a time Mrs. Ferre had baffled him. He didn't know just what to make of her.

In time he became convinced that some exceptional combination of circumstances had embittered her. It really was not greed that sharpened her tongue—it was covetousness. She felt she was qualified to be the brightest star in the social heaven, and she resented the lusters that dimmed her own glow.

Traymore had often endeavored to develop the reason for this attitude, but his most cunning efforts always came to nothing. He studied his men and women that he might use them to strengthen his precarious footing in society. He studied them to discover the way in which he might the more securely bind them to him.

Colonel Meadows analyzed his friends because he was interested in personalities. He was greedy for knowledge of mental processes and human reactions. It was partly from these studies, which had been prosecuted for many years, that he had acquired the knowledge that made him so effective before a jury of twelve men; but the process of analysis had been impersonal and with no thought of capitalizing it.

There was nothing so interesting to the colonel as human beings. He was delighted and astonished with the variety of them. He was continually being astonished by finding meanness and magnanimity nesting in the same person.

He was inordinately fond of Shakespeare. At the banquet table and in the ballroom, when no one suspected that he had a serious thought, he amused himself by classifying the characters about him. Here was a youthful *Falstaff*, and over there was a potential *Frederick* of "As You Like It." He found himself surrounded by *Goneril*, *Regan*, and *Cordelia*. He knew more than one *Lear* and a *Portia* or two. He was continually meeting *Shylocks*, and there were times when he was quite sure that the mantle of *Lady Macbeth* had fallen on Mrs. Ferre.

She was ambitious, and had the courage to serve her ambition at whatever cost. To those who could not serve her, and to those who could not thwart her, she was but a woman, with a woman's capacity to be interesting and magnetic. In deportment she was irreproachably conventional, and yet the colonel was sure that she would not hesitate to violate any and all conventions if such a violation served some purpose of her own.

As Mrs. Ferre greeted them from the door of Ekatrina's room, both Colonel Meadows and Captain Traymore, though they arrived at the same conclusion from very opposite approaches, were sure that self-interest of some sort had brought her.

Both men felt that her arrival was inopportune. In her absence Traymore would have had from the colonel something more

definite in the way of an agreement of silence about the past. The attorney would have had from the detective a complete confession of his mistake and of his willingness to relegate Manwell's crime—if such it were—to the oblivion of the buried and forgotten past.

"I just thought you two busybodies would be here!" Mrs. Ferre exclaimed, laughing. "You both are trying to cheat me out of the honor of having discovered a genius. You shan't rob me of the distinction! Tell me, what is the latest word from the patient?"

Mrs. Ferre passed across the room to Ekatrina, and kissed her with an enthusiasm which had all the earmarks of profound sincerity.

"Captain Traymore says the patient is doing very nicely," the colonel said, when he observed that Traymore hesitated.

"Wonderful!" Mrs. Ferre exclaimed. She patted Ekatrina's shoulder. "We'll have him out of that hospital very soon, my dear. I suppose, colonel, you put in the night reading that interesting manuscript?"

"I finished it about three o'clock. Then I went right to sleep, and slept most of the morning," the colonel admitted.

"Is that a recommendation for the story?" the woman asked.

"It really isn't a story. No, it is a story, but it is vastly more than a story. I recommend it without a reservation. Any one who reads it, I am sure, will be able to sleep more soundly."

Both Mrs. Ferre and Traymore realized that there was a deeper meaning in the colonel's words than was on the surface.

"I'm impatient to read it, colonel. Honestly, I'm really provoked with you because you took the manuscript home last night!" Mrs. Ferre was very charming when she pouted. "Tell me, when may I have it to read?"

Ekatrina began to understand that they were talking about the pages covered with writing—the pages which Manwell had said would bring them much money. Her face brightened, and she turned to Colonel Meadows.

"Is it to make my Herman—what you call it—rich?" she asked eagerly.

"If I am any judge, that manuscript will make Mr. Manwell both famous and rich," the colonel replied with the utmost earnestness. "I really believe that it is a remarkable piece of work, and that it will

cause a sensation when it is published. Traymore, do you think they would permit me to confer with Manwell, if I went to the hospital to-day?"

"I'll see that they do, if you wish it," Traymore said dully.

"No, no! If the doctor says it would be better not to see him, I'll wait. I want to talk to him as soon as I may without jeopardizing his recovery."

"And my Herman wants to see you very much," Ekatrina volunteered. "He is very glad when I told him you have said you will buy the pages for lots of money. He says it is good medicine—so much more good than that what the nurse lady gives him."

"You know, colonel, I've never had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Manwell. I should dearly love to go to the hospital with you. I'm to lunch with Mr. Ferre at the Union League at half past one, and I've nothing urgent until then."

It was rather difficult to deny Mrs. Ferre when she asked in that manner, and the colonel turned to Traymore.

"What do you think about it?"

"I wouldn't do it, if I were you. He's a pretty sick man, and there would be strain and excitement in having callers."

"Believe you are right, Traymore," the colonel agreed. "We had better not take chances, Mrs. Ferre, but I'll promise to take you with me soon. In the meantime I'm mighty glad you came up just when you did. Since you've admitted having some spare time, I want you to help Mrs. Manwell move."

"Move!" Ekatrina and Mrs. Ferre exclaimed in the same breath, while Captain Traymore looked up in surprise.

"Yes," the colonel continued. "There's no reason why they should remain here any longer, and I've found an apartment that will do nicely for them in the building where I'm located."

"How lovely!" cried Mrs. Ferre. "Of course I'll help her!"

"It's a furnished apartment, with everything in it that they will need. You can advise Mrs. Manwell what to take with her and what to discard. Leave most of this stuff here. Let her take the little personal effects she wants, and I'll take her to the new place in my car."

Ekatrina had been staring in open-mouthed wonder. At last she got her breath.

"It is not to move while my Herman is away!" she cried, in a voice charged with excitement. "Is it to go to the high building where Mr. Colonel lives, when Herman is not here to be glad with me?"

It took no more than five minutes for the colonel, who held her complete confidence, to convince Ekatrina that the thing to do was to move to the high building. It was true, as Manwell had told her, that the manuscript was worth a great deal of money. Now that she could afford it, she must come and live across the hall from the colonel, so that he could help her until her husband was well and at home again. Then, if Manwell thought best, they could move wherever they pleased.

Ekatrina was like a child beside itself with joy. She wanted to take with her everything in the house, and the best arguments of Mrs. Ferre and the colonel were needed to convince her that there was no necessity for doing so. To leave the old dishes, the bedding, and the food she had on hand was, to her mind, the wildest sort of folly.

Then a happy thought came to her—it would be very nice to take the dishes and the bedding and the food to certain of her neighbors. She knew exactly where each item was most needed, and she raced about the old apartment house, up and down the back stairs, in happy haste.

While Mrs. Ferre was in the kitchen, Captain Traymore arose, extended his hand to the colonel, and began:

"Meadows, they don't make your sort any more—"

"Now, now, captain!" the colonel interrupted, throwing his free arm over Traymore's shoulder. "You'll understand when you read that manuscript. Let's play we are Doukhobors, with no one to answer to but the Spirit within us. What is past is dead and forgotten. Let's play the game that way once, and see how it goes. I give you my word, I'll stand by you with everything I have, and between us we can see to it that the dead shall remain dead. What do you say?"

"What can I say?" Traymore asked, as he looked wistfully out of the window.

"A true Doukhobor, I suppose, would say, 'Christ is risen,'" the colonel replied.

"Strange words!" Traymore said slowly.

"They don't fit my mouth. I'll talk the language I know. You are damned white, and I'll go all the way to hell for you!"

Traymore gave the colonel's hand a vigorous grip, turned abruptly, and started for the door.

"Better drop in this evening!" the colonel called after him.

As he passed out through the door, Traymore nodded acceptance of the invitation. In the hall he stumbled. He stopped for a moment, and his heavy fists went to his eyes and brushed aside the mist.

XX

PRESENTLY Mrs. Ferre assured the colonel that everything which should be taken to the new abode had been collected and piled on the bed.

"Now, if you really have time and don't mind, Mrs. Ferre," suggested the colonel, "I would appreciate it if you would take Mrs. Manwell in your car and drive over to my apartment. Tell Mrs. Breckinridge to make her feel at home until I get there. I'll be there soon, and I'll bring all this luggage in my car."

Mrs. Ferre agreed to this plan with enthusiasm. Ekatrina had put on her threadbare coat—it was such a coat as would have been looked upon with disdain by Mrs. Ferre's kitchen girl—and was wrapping her shawl, Russian fashion, about her head, when there was a clatter of footsteps in the hall. A moment later Mrs. Tonsho, a baby in her arms and two children hanging to her skirt, stood at the door.

The sight of Colonel Meadows and the strange woman in her very elegant clothes rather awed Mrs. Tonsho. She hesitated for a minute, and then, seeing Ekatrina dressed for the street, she went toward her.

"We have come already to tell you good-by and to say to you how good to us you been. To thank you for so much I cannot say it." Mrs. Tonsho did not seem to mind the tears that slipped down her toiled face. "From all this you get out, and I am too glad for you, but I will you miss, miss, miss!"

The poor woman's free arm went around Ekatrina's neck, and her trembling lips pressed a kiss on each cheek. The two children let go their mooring on their mother's skirt and clung to Ekatrina's until she bent down, took one in either arm, and kissed them.

"But I will come back to see you right away, many times," she promised.

"Please!" Mrs. Tonsho pleaded. "I cannot thank! I cannot! Please!"

In much confusion she turned with her brood toward the hallway.

At the foot of the stairs on the second floor, as Mrs. Ferre and Ekatrina were descending, they found old man Tanes waiting. To Mrs. Ferre he seemed unbelievably feeble and incredibly dirty. A few moments before Ekatrina had given him some of Manwell's clothes, which Mrs. Ferre had insisted ought not to be taken to the new apartment; and there were other benefactions, many of them, which the old man could not forget.

"You be really going to leave us!" he exclaimed in his uncertain voice. "I am glad for your sake. God knows, you deserve the best in the land—the very best in all the land. Good-by, good lady, and good luck!"

He held out a palsied hand to Ekatrina. She took it, leaned toward him, and kissed his wrinkled and dirty cheek. Mrs. Ferre shuddered. The old man stood dumfounded. For several minutes after the two women had descended to the street he stood there, muttering senselessly:

"God knows—God knows—good lady—God knows!"

The two women were on the curb at the side of Mrs. Ferre's car when Mrs. Getz, her hands wrapped in her apron, came from the entrance. Not ten minutes before, Ekatrina had told her the great news, adding that she might have the cooking utensils which would be left in the kitchen. At once Mrs. Getz thought of the fact that only that morning she had demanded and received the money that paid for the third-floor rooms until the following Saturday.

She had heard Mrs. Ferre and Ekatrina coming downstairs, and had remained in her own apartment, out of sight, fully expecting that a demand would be made on her for a rebate. When she realized that Ekatrina was going without asking her to return any of the rent, she followed down the stairs and into the street.

"Mrs. Manwell!" she called, when she was yet several yards away. "You know you really have some money coming to you. I know it isn't always done, but I wouldn't feel right if I kept this."

"It is no difference," Ekatrina interrupted, when she realized what Mrs. Getz was saying. "You always so much need the money, and now Herman and I are to have a lot of it!"

The amazon of the rooming house was

struck dumb with astonishment. The idea of any one declining money paid as advance rent, when the rooms were not to be occupied! To be sure, never in her life had she made such a rebate, although she had had many heated arguments with irate tenants who, for whatever cause, gave up their rooms with the rental account in favor of the landlady. Experience told her that every one tried to get back part of the rent under such circumstances; but this Doukhobor woman had not only refrained from asking for a rebate, but had graciously declined it when it was voluntarily offered to her! Mrs. Getz's lower jaw actually sagged a little.

"Won't you take it, please?" she finally gasped.

Ekatrina was in high spirits. She had not the semblance of a tangible notion of how much Manwell's writing might be worth, but Herman had said that it would bring them much money. If there was much money, there was no need to take a small sum from this woman who seemed always to need money—to need it so badly that she was constantly threatening to put roomers in the street if they did not pay in advance.

"The Spirit tells me not to take it, Mrs. Getz. Only last night you told me how it was you so needed it, and this is only another day," said Ekatrina.

Mrs. Ferre had entered the car, and was an interested spectator of the little scene on the curb. She knew very well that Mrs. Getz was a woman hardened by circumstances—a human turnip, without the milk of kindness in her fiber; and yet, in the presence of the Doukhobor woman, even this petrified soul stirred and showed a disposition to be kind and unselfish. It was quite the most interesting episode that Mrs. Ferre had encountered through her contact with this strange Russian girl.

"Then you'll come and see me, when you are settled," Mrs. Getz suggested wistfully, holding out her hand.

"As soon as I get me a pretty dress," Ekatrina promised, and kissed the shapeless creature and climbed into the car.

Mrs. Getz was not accustomed to being kissed by departing roomers. As a rule they cursed her. As the car rolled north in Dearborn Street, this hulking derelict stood on the curb, one of her red, hamlike hands pressed to the cheek which had been touched by Ekatrina's lips.

When the car was no longer in sight, Mrs. Getz mounted to the third floor. She inspected the rooms, from which Colonel Meadows's chauffeur was carrying the Manwells' effects. She looked at the gas range, counted the light globes, scrutinized the mirror. Nothing was broken. Nothing had been taken away.

She looked at the money in her hand, and shook her head. She went back to her lair on the second floor, feeling as if she had been a party to a miracle.

When, under his supervision, the things that Mrs. Ferre and Ekatrina had gathered together were loaded into the car, Colonel Meadows climbed in and told his chauffeur to drive to the City Hospital. He had a talk with the superintendent, who, in turn, got into touch with the physician directly in charge of Manwell's case. Did he think it would be safe for Colonel Meadows, the well-known attorney, to have a few minutes with the patient?

There was magic in the colonel's name. There was no danger, the doctor said. If Colonel Meadows had good news for the patient, he might go right up to the room. Good news would probably do more for the man than bad medicine. Would the superintendent be good enough to remember Dr. Howard to the colonel?

A few minutes later, Colonel Meadows was seated beside Manwell's bed.

"They tell me you are coming along nicely," the visitor began. "I'm in here for a few minutes only because I promised to do most of the talking. Just got back from the South last night, and when I called at your place I was shocked to hear that you were ill. I have a lot to tell you, Manwell, but it will have to wait for a little while. I came over to find out for myself how you were getting on, and to tell you that I've read the manuscript you wrote. It is wonderful!"

"You've read it?" Manwell exclaimed weakly.

"Now just rest easy, and let me do the talking," the colonel warned. "I read that manuscript last night, or early this morning, and I believe I know something about literary work. It is wonderful, I tell you, and I want to have a hand in getting it before the public. I must have a hand in it, Manwell—I really must! I'm not going to bother you with a bargain right now. We'll wait until you are out of here and can talk business. Things were in a rather

bad way at your place when I called last night, and I've arranged for Mrs. Manwell to move into a small apartment in the building where I am located."

"Of course you know that we can't afford such an expensive place!" Manwell protested feebly.

"I'll see you through until you are on your feet again, and then you can do what you think best," the colonel replied. "In the meantime, Manwell, you haven't a worry in the world. You can put all your energy into getting well. We'll move you to another hospital, if you like."

"They are very good to me here. I'm quite satisfied, and I can rest easy if Trina is safe."

"We'll see to that, and we'll see that she gets over here every day. You must keep me informed how she really feels about her new place."

"You know the world, Colonel Meadows, and you know that I shall never be able to repay you—"

"But you will," the colonel interrupted. "You will, much sooner than you suspect. I am sure of it! I'll take a half interest in your book, and, if you agree, I'll go ahead and try to place it with a publisher."

Manwell's eyes glistened.

"It would be unkind to feed me on false hopes," he said slowly. "Tell me, do you really find some merit in it?"

"Only one person has read it, but I know that it has changed two lives already," the colonel told him. "That, too, is something I must tell you when you are better. Man, get well quickly, because I want to talk to you a great deal. We are going to have many enjoyable evenings together. I'm impatiently looking forward to the time, and it isn't far off, when I shall be pointed out by the envious as the personal friend of the famous author, Herman Manwell!"

"But suppose, Colonel Meadows, that the book was only the story of the man who wrote it—that I simply drew a picture of myself—what then?"

Manwell asked the question hesitantly, with a break or two in his voice. Colonel Meadows stood up. He smiled at the bearded face on the pillow below him.

"If it wasn't just that," he said slowly, "I'd be disappointed. It is only truth that is inspiring and ennobling. It may be the conceit of an old man, but I believe I know truth when I see it, either in the flesh or in print!"

Manwell sighed, as if a burden had rolled from his shoulders. The colonel bade him good-by and was gone.

XXI

If her husband had been well and with her, Ekatrina would have lived in a world of superlative delight during the days when she was being installed in the new apartment. No fewer than a hundred times a day she exclaimed to Mrs. Breckinridge: "It is only to have Herman again quick!"

Twice each day she was taken to the hospital. Colonel Meadows invariably went with her in the morning. In the afternoon, if he was occupied with professional business, he sent out the car, and Mrs. Breckinridge accompanied Ekatrina.

"You-all never saw a woman so wrapped up in a man!" Mrs. Breckinridge informed her husband, after she had put in the first day with her new neighbor. "The first thing she said when she stepped into that apartment was, 'If only my Herman could see it!' I'm becoming powerfully curious about that Herman man, myself. I dare say he's handsome, though the colonel tells me he wears heavy whiskers."

"A most unusual creature, the woman," Mr. Breckinridge began, but his wife interrupted him.

"Not at all, Robert! She's just a simple child—just the innocent, trusting sort that generally gets some good-for-nothing scalawag for a husband, and lives all her life blind to his faults."

The next day Mrs. Breckinridge took Ekatrina shopping. For the Russian girl it was an excursion into fairyland. There were several distressing incidents, however, which, for the time being, confused Ekatrina, if they did not really frighten her.

The first place to which the women went was a famous department store. Mrs. Breckinridge stepped aside at the entrance, and literally pushed her companion into the revolving door. Ekatrina, having no choice in the matter, moved along with the little triangular stall in which she found herself, until somehow it threw her out again, and she found that instead of being inside the building she was in the street, with Mrs. Breckinridge nowhere to be seen.

Just when panic threatened the puzzled woman, Mrs. Breckinridge appeared as if by magic, and explained that Ekatrina had remained in the turnstile door too long. A

second attempt, and the two women successfully negotiated the strange entrance. Once she got the idea of it, Ekatrina insisted on standing for five minutes to watch people come and go.

A few minutes later a more serious misadventure overtook the two women. Ekatrina, following a pace behind Mrs. Breckinridge, started up a flight of stairs. No sooner was her foot on the first of the steps than she realized that they were moving. She made a frenzied grab for the hand railing, and held to it with the unreasoning strength of the panic-stricken.

As a result, she found that her feet were going up and up, while her grim hold on the railing held her body stationary. A man who had stepped upon the escalator directly behind her literally caught her in his arms, else she would have had a dangerous fall. By the time her rescuer had set her on her feet again, she had been carried to the floor above, and was shunted on the landing. The experience taught Ekatrina caution, and it showed Mrs. Breckinridge how unbelievably inexperienced the Russian girl was.

In spite of these accidents—and they included a veritable shower bath which Ekatrina gave herself when she tried to quench her thirst at a drinking fountain—it was a joyous day for Mrs. Manwell, and Mrs. Breckinridge enjoyed it so thoroughly that she confided to her husband that night:

"It was better than a circus!"

Their chief mission that day was to get a respectable wardrobe for Ekatrina. She had never seen such a display of pretty things, and she would have been unable to make a choice from the gorgeous array if Mrs. Breckinridge had not been present to give aid and counsel. The colonel's housekeeper was a thrifty woman, of good taste, and whatever her employer paid her for her services, she saved him enough that day to pay her own salary for many months.

Late that night Colonel Meadows and Mrs. Breckinridge checked up on the day's purchases. There were shoes, stockings, underwear, two house dresses, a street suit, an afternoon dress, an evening gown of very conservative design, and a Bolivia coat with fur collar and cuffs. There were incidentals—feminine frailties, as the colonel called them. He had Mrs. Breckinridge's word for it that all the purchases were good values.

"I think you-all will realize that we got nothing shoddy when you get the bill, colonel!" Mrs. Breckinridge said, by way of concluding her report.

"We'll take care of that," the colonel replied.

A few minutes later he was laughing until the tears rolled down his face, while Mrs. Breckinridge related some of the experiences of the day.

A much more serious colonel sat in his library half an hour later, alternately fingering the pages of Manwell's manuscript and staring absent-mindedly at the gas flame in the fireplace. He had taken up the manuscript with the intention of preparing some of the pages for typing—a task which he proposed to delegate to his stenographer and secretary; but he found himself unable to concentrate his attention on the work.

Repeatedly his thoughts were diverted to Captain Traymore. He had not heard from the chief of detectives since that extraordinary conversation in Ekatrina's room, and this disturbed him. Colonel Meadows realized that the consciousness of another's knowledge of one's own weakness often arouses an unreasonable dislike for the man who knows; and he feared that this might be the case with Traymore.

The colonel was enough of a student of his own mental processes to realize that his chief interest in the whole situation was the Doukhobor woman. He had been strangely drawn to her from the very first time he saw her. Perhaps Mrs. Breckinridge, who had known the late Mrs. Meadows, revealed the secret of this attraction when, months later, she remarked to her husband:

"There is something about that dear woman that reminds me of Mrs. Meadows. Have you noticed it, Robert?"

The fact that Mr. Breckinridge hadn't noticed in Ekatrina anything suggesting his former mistress proved nothing. Perhaps Mrs. Breckinridge had a more accurate memory of Mrs. Meadows, and undoubtedly the colonel, who had loved his wife beyond the power of human expression, retained a picture of her that did not lack a single detail. If there was in Ekatrina's face or bearing something suggestive of Felice Oglethorpe Meadows, the first person in the world to detect it would have been the colonel.

The attorney, for whatever reason, was determined that no hurt should come to

Ekatrina. He realized that she was but a child seeking a great and glorious adventure which, in her childlike faith, she was sure awaited her. He wanted her to find that adventure, and he wanted it to prove as glorious as her childish imagination had pictured it. To bring this about, he would have to protect Manwell; and now it appeared, by some strange freak of fortune, that if Manwell was to be shielded from the consequences of his own folly, Traymore must be included in that protection.

Colonel Meadows did not share the popular prejudices against rich people. He knew that wealth does not change human nature; it only accentuates vices and expands virtues. If Traymore would tell him the entire story behind that scene with Ekatrina, the colonel was sure that he could straighten out the tangle so that no one should suffer. He knew many rich men. There was not one of them but would experience a great deal of personal pleasure in helping a man to go right if, in some careless moment, he had made a mistake.

The whole situation depended, it seemed to Colonel Meadows, on Traymore. If the detective would trust the colonel, and tell him exactly what the curtain of the past concealed, the veteran attorney was confident that he could take care of his clients—and in this case his clients were Ekatrina, Manwell, and Traymore.

He resolved to get in touch with Traymore the next morning. There was no probability of Manwell's leaving the hospital for several weeks, and yet, the colonel felt, there was a reason for haste in establishing a complete understanding between Traymore and Manwell. Mrs. Ferre was that reason.

Ekatrina knew no guile, and Mrs. Ferre was taking an ever increasing interest in the Doukhobor woman. The colonel strongly suspected that there was something not quite sincere in this interest. Intuitively he realized that for the present, at least, it was better to keep Mrs. Ferre from too intimate contact with Ekatrina and her husband.

She was insisting that she should be permitted to go to the hospital and see the sick man. There was no apparent reason why she should not be permitted to do this, and the colonel was sure that he would eventually have to yield to her insistence.

Mrs. Ferre was even more pressing in her requests to be permitted to read Man-

well's manuscript. Here, again, there was no apparent reason for denying her, and yet the colonel was determined that she should not read the manuscript until he knew every detail of the tragedy that had inspired Manwell to write.

In the morning, the colonel decided, he would take the manuscript to his office, and for a few days he could truthfully say that it was not available, because his stenographer was typing it. That would be a plausible excuse to give Mrs. Ferre.

On the other hand, he wanted Traymore to read Manwell's work at the earliest possible moment. He would call the detective in the morning and urge him to come to the office.

The next morning, Mrs. Breckinridge made the discovery that Ekatrina had slept on the davenport, with her clothes on, because she had been afraid of the folding bed. Nevertheless, she had slept soundly, and was in high spirits when she joined the colonel at the breakfast table. She did not like the idea of having Mrs. Breckinridge wait on them, and rather insisted that the housekeeper and Breckinridge should have places at the table, until she was told that both of them had had their breakfast long before.

While they were at the table, a telephone call came in. When Breckinridge informed Colonel Meadows that Mr. Ferre was on the wire, the colonel went to his library telephone, expecting to be importuned to invite Mrs. Ferre to accompany Ekatrina on her morning visit to the hospital. He hesitated a minute before speaking into the telephone, trying to fortify himself with some reasonable excuse for withholding the invitation.

He might say that it would perhaps be better if she would be good enough to defer her visit until the afternoon, because Manwell, as a rule, was not so well in the morning. That would serve for the present; but Mr. Ferre made no reference to his wife, and only inquired when it would be convenient for the colonel to see him on a business matter of rather urgent importance. He would come to the colonel's office at any hour the attorney might designate; but the earlier the appointment, the better he would like it.

The colonel thought for a moment. It was imperative, he felt, that he should see Captain Traymore at once. Ferre's business probably meant a substantial fee, but

fees were very trivial matters compared with the destiny of these persons in whom the colonel had become so profoundly interested.

He suggested that Ferre should join him at luncheon, but the broker insisted that the business in hand ought not to be set back until noon. In fact, he was quite anxious to go directly to the colonel's office. The matter was urgent, he said, and of such a confidential nature that he refrained from even intimating its character over a telephone.

Very well, then—the colonel would see him at ten o'clock. The Southern gallantry for which he was noted prompted the veteran attorney to express the hope that Mrs. Ferre was enjoying her usual good health.

"Thanks for your interest, colonel," Ferre replied over the wire, "but she's a bit under the weather this morning. She had planned to see that interesting protégé of yours again to-day, but I'm afraid she'll not venture out."

Colonel Meadows expressed the hope that Mrs. Ferre would soon be herself again. On his way back to the interrupted breakfast, he found himself rather well satisfied that the woman was indisposed.

Ekatrina was much excited. She was impatient for her new and pretty clothes to arrive, so that she might wear some of them "to show Herman." She had thought it very foolish not to take them home with her when they had been selected, but Mrs. Breckinridge had persuaded her that it

would be better to have the bundles delivered.

Ekatrina had very grave doubts of ever seeing the packages again. It would be nothing less than a miracle, she thought, if the pretty dresses were not delivered to some one else. Her impatience for the arrival of the packages is not surpassed by that of small children waiting for their first glimpse of the Christmas tree on Christmas morning.

It was agreed that Mrs. Breckinridge should go with Ekatrina on her morning visit to the hospital. The colonel would place his car at their disposal, and, as he frequently did when the weather permitted, he would walk to his office.

As he started, Ekatrina followed him into the reception hall, brushed aside Breckinridge, held the colonel's overcoat for him, and saw to it that his muffler was just so.

"And you had better take a very good look at me, Mr. Colonel, because when you come home this night I am to be not the same woman," she said, when the colonel was at the door, ready to go.

Colonel Meadows snapped on the light, looked at her in mock gravity, and then said:

"You will be always the same, I hope. If the clothes should make you a different woman, I would be very unhappy."

"I was only making a joke!" Ekatrina hastened to exclaim. "How could a new dress make me to be not just Ekatrina Manwell?"

(To be continued in the December number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

CELESTIAL, THOUGH OF CLAY

"WHAT am I to do? What am I to do?"

Sighs the average soul,

Seeker of the guerdon's

Still retreating goal;

Weary of its burdens

And its journey, too.

What a sad to do! What a sad to do!

Brothers, watch the sun! Sisters, watch the moon!

Endlessly they give

Without asking payment;

In a groove they live,

In the selfsame raiment,

Foils of night and noon—

Brothers of the sun, sisters of the moon.

Richard Butler Glaenzer

Home

WHY PEEWEE PENDLETON DIDN'T ENJOY HIS VACATION AS MUCH AS MOST OF THE BOYS

By Katharine Brush

IT was just an ordinary train, a long string of cars headed by a puffy, fussy engine. You saw it coming far down the track, enlarging before your eyes, looming nearer, blowing its hot breath against your face. You heard the creak of its brakes, and then suddenly it was standing quite still before you, yours to command. You got on, you and a hundred jostling, joyous schoolmates of yours, and all in a minute it ceased to be a mere train and became, by some miraculous process, vacation, exemplified in shining glass and singing steel.

Peewee Pendleton—so called because he was the littlest boy at the academy—was familiar with this strange railroad phenomenon. He had lived through two years of periodic holidays, and always, when his small, stubby legs clambered up the steps of the coach, he experienced the same exquisite ecstasy.

To-day was no exception. He mounted in haste, impelled from the rear by a pushing throng, his suit case bumping against the blue serge knee of his very best suit, his heart hammering wildly. Vacation! Home!

Once up and in, he chose the nearest empty seat and plumped himself upon its green plush, quite breathless. His eyes, round brown holes in a round pink face, took in a scene of such confusion as only a hundred excited boarding school boys know how to create—hurried figures, swarming up and down the aisle, into seats and out of them again; bags thumping into place on overhead racks; scuffling, argument, laughter, badinage.

There were a few unfortunates who had been too "broke" to buy tickets. These, entirely cheerful, and quite oblivious to the stares of alien passengers, were crawling on hands and knees beneath the dusty security

of seats turned back to back, and calling to their mates to conceal them, with overcoats heaped over them smotheringly, against the conductor's inspection.

Peewee extracted a bit of white pasteboard from a remote pocket and placed it carefully on the window sill at his elbow, feeling rather superior. One Eddie Edwards, a Junior Department student like himself, sat down beside him, planting brightly polished shoes upon his suit case.

"Gosh!" Eddie sighed happily.

"Yeah," said Peewee, who knew exactly the emotions this fervent monosyllable was intended to express. "'S great, isn't it?"

"Great?" Eddie echoed. "Well, I should say it's great! Two whole weeks—no Latin, no algebra, no demerits, no study hall—gosh!"

The train began moving, and both boys turned their entire attention to the changing landscape beyond the windows. They watched silently until the distant tower of the academy's main building had been sighted and safely passed. Then they leaned back again in renewed contentment, and fell to crunching chocolate bars, produced, after intensive search, from the midst of an amazing débris in Eddie's overcoat pocket.

"What you gon' to do, this vacation?" inquired the donor thickly, after a moment.

"Oh, everything," replied Peewee.

A vague answer, but it sufficed for Eddie, who was anxious to tell what he himself would do. He told it forthwith, amid bites. He would see all the shows. He would be taken to a prize fight, maybe. He would sleep all morning, and go to the movies every afternoon, and eat chicken and cream puffs in limitless quantity. His folks would meet him at the train.

"Your folks going to meet you at the train?" he demanded of Peewee.

"Well, no—not both of 'em. One or the other will, I s'pose, but not both of 'em."

Peewee's face, as he made this answer, was flushed by a wave of unnatural red that crept up to his temples and around his ears. He could feel it, and it annoyed him. Eddie's question annoyed him. The whole business annoyed him. Somehow it always made him secretly ashamed, as if it was his fault that his father and mother would not be there together to meet him—would not, in fact, ever be anywhere together, again.

Something had come between his father and mother that had thrust them apart, made them as strangers. Peewee didn't know what this something was, except that its other name was divorce, and that it filled him, whenever he thought of it, with a vague melancholy and a sense of helplessness. It was like having two friends—two of the dearest, nearest friends in all the world—who liked you awfully, both of them, but who couldn't be induced to like each other. You were always trying to think of ways to make them like each other, but you couldn't.

Eddie, unsuspecting, was chattering on.

"Well, mine 'll both be there, I'll tell the world—with bells on! They'll come running up to me, and mother 'll kiss me and ask me why I haven't got my rubbers, or something else silly like that, and dad 'll slap me on the back and call me 'old man.' Then we'll go somewhere and have the biggest dinner you ever saw, and then we'll go home, and then we'll—"

His voice ran along, but Peewee ceased to listen. He had absorbed the picture of Eddie's parents, together, meeting him at the station; and with this as a sort of glowing background, his mind took up its perpetual wrestling with its own paramount problem.

What was the matter, anyhow? Why were things as they were with him? His mother was the sweetest and most beautiful woman in all the world, and his father the wisest and finest and cleverest man. They were twice as nice as Eddie's mother and father, he'd bet—ten times as nice! And yet Eddie's mother and father got along together all right, while his—

He was assailed by a great, aching loneliness, in which everything—the crowded, chattering coach, the familiar heads in the forward seats, Eddie beside him—everything in the world that was tangible and

dear—seemed to recede and leave him in a dark, mysterious place all by himself. At school he was just like other boys; but when he went home, as now, he became automatically different, a being apart, a boy who didn't have any real home to go to.

His holiday mood slipped from him, though he groped for it and tried hard to retain it. He turned his face to the window and dug his chin firmly into the palm of a grubby hand, to still its quivering. You see, he was only ten and a half, this small Peewee.

"You aren't listening!" Eddie accused plaintively.

"I was looking at that lake we just passed. What did you say, Eddie?"

"I asked you whereabouts in Boston your house is."

Worse! Much worse! The darned old fool, why couldn't he stop asking so many questions? Peewee knew a moment of fierce hatred for his blundering companion, but he replied, with a masterly attempt at calm:

"I got two houses. One's a big one on Beacon Street, and one's an apartment on Commonwealth Avenue."

"And do you live in both of 'em?"

"Uh-uh."

Eddie's eyes widened in astonishment.

"What's the big idea?" he exclaimed.

"We have two houses, too, but one's in Maine, for summer. I never heard of having two in the same city and living in both of 'em!"

Peewee hesitated. It was not in his nature to lie about this thing, or any other thing. He simply couldn't lie; but, like many people to whom this helpful method of avoiding tight places is impossible, he could equivocate, and did, as follows:

"Mother likes an apartment better, and dad likes a house better; so we keep both going at once."

"Oh!" said Eddie, and appeared to meditate.

Peewee watched him from the corner of a furtive eye, fearful of his next remark. One more question, and the whole ghastly truth must come out; but Eddie didn't ask the question. Apparently satisfied, he veered to a description of his own home, and Peewee breathed again.

II

At Back Bay Eddie left him, one of a struggling, pushing group that lined the

aisle to the door, shouting good-byes, and treading each on the heels of the next in their eagerness to be out. From the window Peewee had a brief glimpse of a dimly lit platform peopled with waiting parents in pairs—always in pairs. Then the train went on, and brought him to the South Station.

His father was there to meet him. From afar Peewee's eyes could pick him out—a big, handsome figure in a swinging raccoon coat and a felt hat set on at a slightly rakish angle. He experienced an exultant surge of pride. His father! His!

He began to run, dodging through the crowd, and threw himself into the welcoming arms.

"Dad!" he cried. "Oh, dad!"

He hoped the fellows from school were looking. He wanted them all to see this wonderful being in the huge fur coat, and to know that it was his father—Peewee Pendleton's father.

"Oh, dad!" he said again, and hugged him mightily.

They made their way through the roaring station, arm in arm, laughing, talking both at once, and in a minute they were seated close together in the deep back seat of his father's limousine.

"Let's have a good look at you, son," said Mr. Pendleton, as they drove away. "Feeling all right these days, are you?"

"Fine!" Peewee answered. "How are you, dad? How's—mother?"

"She's well, and very anxious to see you. You're to go out there later."

He said it evenly, matter-of-factly, but somehow it withered Peewee's young enthusiasm and slew his moment of sheer and perfect happiness. He wondered sensitively if any of the fellows had noticed that his mother hadn't come with his father to meet him, and if they had thought it queer.

They had no right to think it queer, he told himself rather angrily. There were lots of reasons why a mother might not come to the station. She might have a cold, or something. He hoped they had thought she had a cold.

"I'll be glad to see her, too," he said aloud.

Across a little white square of tablecloth in the grill room of a great hotel he waxed merry again, stimulated by the unaccustomed surroundings, and by the food, which tasted like manna from heaven. He talked incessantly, even when his mouth was so

full as to make his words almost unintelligible. He became eloquent, and branched his fork in oratorical gestures. He delivered himself of a multitude of stored-up boyish confidences, giggled a great deal, and always saw an answering sympathetic amusement in his father's face that was delightful.

He felt a little sorry when at last his father said:

"Anything else you'd like, son? If not, we'll go. It's about time I was sending you out to your mother's."

"Aren't you coming with me?" Peewee begged. "Oh, please, dad! You come with me! I don't want to leave you so soon."

"You want to see your mother, don't you, son?"

There was a wistful note in Mr. Pendleton's voice. It was almost as if he hoped that Peewee might say no; but the boy noticed nothing.

"Sure I do!" he said. "I should say I do, but I wish I didn't have to leave you!"

"I'll come after you in a few hours," his father told him. "It won't be long."

They were silent throughout the drive to the apartment house on Commonwealth Avenue. Mr. Pendleton sat up very stiff and straight, staring ahead into the twilight. Peewee nestled close to him, and also stared ahead, his thoughts tinged once more with the old familiar hurt. His father—then his mother—but never the supreme happiness of both of them near him at once! He longed achingly to do something about it, but there didn't seem to be anything he could possibly do.

They swept up to the curb before an ornate façade, and Peewee stepped out. He turned beseeching young eyes upon his father, hoping against hope that Mr. Pendleton might change his mind and come with him, but knowing quite well that he would not.

"You remember which apartment it is, son?"

"Yes, I know."

"I'll be back for you about nine o'clock, then. And, son—"

"Yes, dad?"

His father leaned toward him from the gloom of the limousine and fixed him with a grave, searching glance.

"Don't—you won't believe anything your mother may say—er—about me, will you?"

"No, I won't, dad," Peewee promised wonderingly.

Still wondering, Peewee went in to meet his mother.

III

OH, but she was beautiful, his mother! Tall and slender and sweet-smelling, with eyes like stars and golden hair that rippled away from her face in even, perfect waves. She reminded Peewee of the princesses in the fairy tales that he still read secretly at school, when the fellows weren't around. He threw his chubby arms about her, and stood on the tips of his toes to kiss her smackingly, over and over.

"Oh, mother, you look so nice!" he sighed.

"Do I, dear? And are you glad to see me? I—I thought you were never coming!"

"Dad and I had dinner first," Peewee explained. "Then he drove me out here. I wanted him to come in with me, but he wouldn't." Sensing that this wasn't just the thing he should have said, he amended placatingly: "I guess he had an engagement some place else, or something."

"Yes," his mother agreed in a queer voice. "Yes, no doubt. He almost always did have."

Her face was stern, rather frightening, for a moment. Then, the next moment, she became the gay and joyous mother that Peewee most adored. She led him to a divan heaped with cushions of many colors, made him sit there close beside her, held his hand, and demanded that he should tell her "every single thing."

So Peewee began to talk, and his mother listened with the same rapt attention that his father had accorded him, interrupting with a question now and then, and laughing often.

He loved to tell things to his mother. She always seemed to understand everything so perfectly, and to enjoy what he enjoyed, as if they were of an age. She had a way of saying, "And then, of course, you did so and so"—of guessing what was to come next—that Peewee found mysterious but charming.

She produced a giant slab of most delicious cake at precisely the moment when Peewee's dinner was sufficiently a thing of the past to permit of enthusiastic enjoyment. She was, he reflected, an absolutely perfect mother!

It was while he was eating the cake, saving the frosting until the last, so that the process might end up in the purest chocolate glory, that he heard the horn of his father's car, unmistakably, outside in the street. They both heard it. His mother's great eyes, suddenly robbed of all their sparkle, met Peewee's.

"There's your father," she observed tonelessly.

"Yes," Peewee said. "Yes, that's dad. I'll have to go, I s'pose."

He did not move.

His mother took both his hands in those of hers that were so white and small and soft, yet so oddly strong. She peered into his face, as if she would read his mind.

"You don't want to go, dear?"

"No," Peewee said. "Only—well, it's dad."

Mrs. Pendleton moved across to a window fronting on the street, pulled aside the curtains, and looked out. With her back toward Peewee, she said:

"Go out and ask your father to come in for a moment. I should like to speak to him."

After an amazed moment, Peewee sped off on this errand, his heart high. Dad was coming in! Mother had wanted dad to come in! They would be all together, the three of them, in his mother's apartment!

It was years since the three of them had been together. Mother had said—why, maybe that meant—maybe everything was going to be all right from now on!

He reached the sidewalk, panting, and flung himself against the door of the waiting limousine.

"Dad!" he shrilled. "Come in! She wants you to come in!"

He saw his father's face, strangely white in the gloom.

"She what? What is it, son?"

"Mother wants you to come in! She told me to tell you she wants to see you. Hurry, dad!"

Mr. Pendleton hesitated, and Peewee, terror-stricken, felt that he was going to refuse. Then he alighted, threw a word to the chauffeur, and walked beside Peewee into the apartment house.

Mrs. Pendleton was awaiting them, framed in her outer doorway, like some gorgeous living portrait. She spoke no conventional greeting, but said:

"William, I want you to let me keep Junior."

Peewee turned from her to his father, and stood looking up at him expectantly. Just what he expected he did not attempt to analyze, but he knew that his father's reply decidedly was not it. His father stared at his mother oddly for a breathless few seconds, and said:

"That's impossible, Clarice."

"Why is it impossible?"

"You know why."

"But I want him! I want him! He's mine—my baby!"

"According to the courts," Mr. Pendleton put in significantly, "he is *not* yours. He's mine, and he's coming home with me now."

They faced each other across Peewee's head, ignoring him so utterly that the boy fancied that they must have forgotten he was there.

Mr. Pendleton was calm, and a small smile, which Peewee somehow found unpleasant to look at, drew up the corners of his mouth. Mrs. Pendleton was not calm. She was very far from calm. She fairly blazed with anger.

"The courts!" she repeated scathingly. "What have they to do with it? He's mine! I bore him, suffered for him—bone of my bone—he's mine, I tell you—all I have in the world!"

She dropped suddenly, her passion slipping from her like a loosened garment. She seemed weary and sad now, and a little old.

"I haven't seen him for so long," she murmured, and sat down on the divan, both of her trembling, jeweled hands thrown up to shield her face.

There was a silence. Peewee looked at his father, standing there so straight and solemn and unyielding, and then at his mother. A tremendous pity for her welled up in his throat, and would not be gulped down. He wanted greatly to comfort her, to do something, anything, that might make her lift her face again and smile at him. He moved toward her and patted her hands awkwardly.

"Aw, mother!" he protested. "Don't! Don't feel bad, mother!"

The hands fluttered away from her face, and Peewee realized that she had been crying. He felt panicky. His mother crying! Why, grown up people didn't cry! She *mustn't* cry!

He turned again, desperately, to his father. Why in the world didn't his father

do something? Couldn't he see that she was crying?

"Don't be melodramatic, Clarice," his father was saying quietly. "It's all settled, of course. I wouldn't make a scene before the boy, if I were you."

His mother rose abruptly, dabbing at her eyes with a bit of lace.

"No," she faltered. "No, I mustn't. You're right, William."

She stooped to kiss Peewee. She looked long into his troubled eyes, and ruffled his hair in a way she had—a way which he had always hated, but which somehow he didn't hate now.

"Good night, darling," she said gently. "You go with father now. I'll see you tomorrow, perhaps—soon, anyway?"

This last was put in the form of a question and directed over the top of Peewee's head to Peewee's father.

Mr. Pendleton nodded.

"Soon—yes."

And Peewee, dumb with anguish and bewilderment, was led away.

IV

THE academy, reassembled after its two weeks' vacation, had much to impart, to whosoever would listen, anent its individual activities in the interim. Every one had had a superlative time. Every one said so rapturously—every one, that is, except Peewee.

The omission was remarked by Eddie Edwards on the day after vacation ended, in the presence of a group of their contemporaries. They had reminisced extravagantly for an hour, but Peewee had contributed nothing.

"What's the matter, Peewee?" Eddie demanded finally. "You haven't said a word. Didn't you have a good time while you were home?"

Peewee started, like one who is caught dreaming.

"Oh—why, yes, sure I did! I had a grand time! I saw some plays with my mother and some basket-ball games with my dad, and went to an awful lot of different places, and—gee, yes, I had a grand time!"

After a moment he added comfortably: "It's kind of nice to be back at school, though."

They all smiled with fine scorn at what was generally conceded to be Peewee's little joke.

The Auction

THE CHORUS GIRL WIDOW OF AN ARISTOCRAT PLANS DIRE
REVENGE UPON HER HUSBAND'S FAMILY

By B. Beatrice Lubitz

FOR more than a week four men estimated the prices and tied little white numbered tags on the furniture, the vases, the pictures, and all the thousands of treasures in the collection of the late Howard Lamont. The day before the auction three typists sat before typewriters—noiseless machines, out of respect for the deceased—typing long white lists of the contents of the house and filling in tiny numbers in colored inks.

Violette Lamont enjoyed every minute of the preparations for the auction. She enjoyed walking, clad in her fashionable black, among the typists, peering over their shoulders, and marveling at the speed with which they typed. She was alert to the four men who quietly discussed the works of art as they appraised them.

She resented not one whit their quiet, persistent fingering of the treasures of Howard Lamont—opening drawers which, in his lifetime, he had permitted no one to disturb, lifting lids of curiously carved boxes, and unearthing manuscripts and faded yellow papers from ancient leather pouches. No, Violette watched them with interest, and with an enjoyment that she hadn't felt since she came to this house, three years before, as a bride.

On the morning of the auction she lingered in her boudoir, which now had the impersonality of a shop window. Little tags dangled from her dressing table and her pearl-inlaid desk, and white numbered slips were pasted on the pictures. Even the draperies were tagged. Her trunks were packed and gone.

She looked idly about the room, walked to the windows, and looked down at the formal garden that Howard Lamont had built eighteen years before; but the garden only irritated her. She jerked herself free

from the flowing jade and orchid draperies, and stood in the center of the room, reflected on three sides by gleaming mirrors. Unconsciously she posed.

Then she stepped into the upper hall. There was a swish of whispers. People were arriving for the sale.

She knew that she ought not to stay. It was undignified for her to be there; but the temptation of an opportunity to see his family—perhaps even to see *her*—was too great. She couldn't bear to miss it. She couldn't tear herself away.

The auctioneer, a floor below, seeing her poised hesitatingly on the steps, came slowly up the stairs. He was a short, dark, intellectual-looking man, more like a college professor than an auctioneer. Violette had been disappointed when she first saw him. She would have preferred a fat, vulgar auctioneer who would hold up Howard Lamont's priceless treasures and auction them off in the style of Fourteenth Street, or of the boardwalk sales at Atlantic City.

"Is everything all right?" he asked courteously.

His voice was low and carefully modulated. He puzzled Violette. She did not trust his ability to sell convincingly and with sufficient jazz. She would have engaged some other man, but the executors of the estate persuaded her not to. They told her that he was the best appraiser in the country, and virtually insisted that she should retain him.

"Oh, yes, I suppose so," she assented carelessly. "Are the people beginning to come?"

"Yes, madam." He stared at the carpet uncomfortably. "The library has been shipped to—er—to the other—I mean the first Mrs. Lamont," he blundered. "The museum has sent for the pictures, too."

His voice trailed off

Violette enjoyed the man's discomfiture. Her eyebrows arched as she regarded him fixedly.

"Will the first Mrs. Lamont be here, do you know?"

She couldn't keep the note of eagerness out of her voice.

"I don't know, madam."

"What time does the auction begin?"

"Pretty soon, madam. Have you any further instructions?"

"Oh, no," she said casually, as he withdrew, bowing. "Ass!" she muttered, grimacing, when he was out of hearing.

With a haughty step, the widow of Howard Lamont descended the stairs to the lowest floor, her French heels making crushed marks in the thick carpet. On the massive mahogany table in the dining room was displayed the famous silverware of the Lamonts. It had been in the family for generations, and now it was going into the hands of strangers. Well, it served them right!

Violette was turning the entire four-story house over to outsiders, to buy the traditions of the Lamonts. She examined the massive wrought silver pieces. She was sick with impatience for the sale to begin.

"This is my revenge," she mused, as she went upstairs. "This is my grand revenge for all their insults. My happiness is complete!"

II

BEAUTIFULLY gowned women and well groomed men were already wandering through the rooms. Violette was annoyed at this. She had wished to have the auction turned over to the public, but the auctioneer arbitrarily ruled against her suggestion. She felt sure that he was in league with the executors.

For the first week the auction was to be open only to invited guests. After that the unsold articles would be up for public sale. The auctioneer assured her that the most money could be made in this way; and even though Violette ached to get even with the Lamonts, she did want to get all the money she could out of the sale.

The doors between the library, the drawing-room, and the music room had been removed. A long wooden table ran the entire length of the three rooms, and upon it were exhibited the curios, art objects, and antiques which Howard Lamont had collected during his lifetime.

Along the sides of the room the furniture was displayed in period groups—old English, French, Dutch, early colonial. This furniture represented the history of the Lamonts from the seventeenth century to the present time.

On the walls were hung rich tapestries, paintings, etchings, and bronzes. Although Howard Lamont had divided his paintings between his friends and the museum, the largest number of them had been bequeathed to his young widow.

There were carved ivory from Africa, curios from Japan—rare curios, centuries old—vases from Egypt, Chinese jades, and gleaming, iridescent glassware that darted fire in the afternoon sun, which slanted into the library through the tall windows of stained glass. There were tiny, intricately carved clocks from Switzerland; embroidered laces, magnificent icons, and carved saints in solid gold, from Russia; exotic dolls from France; antiques priceless for their rarity. The display was a miniature museum.

Howard Lamont had been a collector of beauty all his life. Most of these treasures were the result of his own travel and excavations. To complete his collection, he had financed expeditions to far-off places. Only in the last three years of his life had he done no active collecting. He spent these years compiling and studying his treasures; but frequently, to the disgust of Violette, shabbily dressed men would come to the dignified old house on Central Park West with "junk" for Howard Lamont to examine.

"Snooping, snooping," Violette called this collective instinct of Howard's. "I suppose you're snooping for more junk to litter up the place," she would say bitterly, when he excused himself for being unable to accompany her to the theater on the pretext of work.

Howard seemed unaware of her rancor. For him she never lived—she merely existed. After a three months' wooing she suddenly married him, and, just as suddenly, he stopped wooing her, as if the job were done. He was always thoughtful, with the irritating impersonality that characterized his whole set. "Damned uppishness," Violette termed it.

He was invariably gentle, quiet, and cultured, but even in their most intimate moments he had been detached, aloof. She could have screamed, could have died with

anger. He was dismayed at her frequent outbursts, but he promptly forgot them. He was unfathomable, beyond her reach.

It was hell—three years of maddening torture—to live with him. Sometimes Violette was willing to chuck it all, but then came the thought of his wealth. He was rich and ailing, and Broadway, her old hunting ground, thought that she had made a magnificent catch.

Now, when she thought of him, she burned; but she shook off the depressing effect that his memory had on her. This was her revenge—sweet, sweet revenge—revenge against him and his whole family.

III

THE rooms were almost uncomfortably crowded. Violette knew that people were discussing her presence. She stood with her back to a sun-drenched niche of flowers. She felt that the women whose lorgnettes were discreetly leveled at her were jealous. She was a woman of vast wealth now. Three years ago she was a chorus girl, and now she was the widow of Howard Lamont.

She looked at a glittering array of rare stones. They winked at her as they caught the sunlight. Yes, this was the happiest moment she had known in nearly three years, now that she was deliberately offering his treasures for sale. No one knew that the Lamont mansion was to be made over into non-housekeeping apartments. That was going to be her last coup. McVey & Waters, her agents, had announced that it had been sold to be remodeled. She bubbled into laughter as she thought of the chagrin and horror of the Lamonts.

Ah, there was Howard Lamont's mother—her worthy mother-in-law! She was dressed in deep mourning. Something froze in Violette. Perhaps *she* was there. No, the elder Mrs. Lamont was with Una, Howard's sister.

Seeing Violette, Mrs. Lamont nodded kindly and smiled. Violette greeted her. Una waved, too, in a friendly way, and turned to talk to another woman. Could that be she? No, that woman was too old.

Violette's eyes left that group, and studied the rest of the people. If she could only see *her*—Mary Galt Lamont, the woman to whom Howard had been married for eighteen years—the woman for whom the formal gardens had been made!

In the three years of Violette's married life she never once saw the first Mrs. La-

mont. Howard would never talk about her. Violette was bitten by the most cruel kind of curiosity. She prodded him again and again, but she could not get a word from him about Mary Lamont. There wasn't a picture, or a book, or even a scrap of paper, in the house to suggest that Mary Lamont had been its mistress for eighteen years. Violette had studied newspaper files of eighteen years back, and had searched through society journals and magazines for a picture of Mary; but she had never found one. If she saw her now, she wouldn't even know her.

From the servants Violette gleaned that Mary Lamont was dark—as dark as Violette was pinkly blond; that she was short and slender, with a beautiful neck. Violette was tall, with a swanlike neck, inclined to be too thin for beauty.

No one knew the former Mrs. Lamont very well. The servants simply said that she was "wonderful."

Why Howard Lamont, conservative banker and son of bankers, should have divorced Mary Galt Lamont and married Violette Smith, a dancer, no one—not even Violette—ever knew. The members of his family never discussed the matter. It was as if Mary Lamont were dead.

There was Mrs. Case-Pruyn, Howard's great-aunt, with waving plumes in her hat. There were cousins, and distant relatives, and Howard's vast miscellany of friends—artists, writers, actors, newspapermen. Violette nodded coldly in response to surprised but polite greetings. She tossed her head.

"They probably think it's not 'refined' for me to be here. Damned aristocrats!" she thought bitterly.

No one had snubbed Violette when Howard Lamont brought her as a bride to the dignified house on Central Park West. They were too thoroughbred for that. They just ignored her as if she weren't there. When she called on them with her husband, they were gracious, but never cordial. On the rare occasions when they came to dine at the huge old house, they were tolerant and a little amused.

She wished they would snub her. If old Mrs. Lamont, for instance, had looked at her through her lorgnette with an insolent air, like the dowagers of musical comedy, she would have had an excuse to relieve her feelings; but Mrs. Lamont didn't even carry a lorgnette. She was always sweet and kind, and as distant and impersonal as

the stars. It was that quality in all the Lamonts that nearly drove Violette crazy in those three miserable years.

Always in her married life there was the shadow of Mary Lamont. Violette longed to know why this quiet, dignified scholar had divorced Mary Lamont, as much as she longed to know why he had married her; but he never told her, not even in his rare bursts of anger.

The crowd was moving about as if at an afternoon reception. The air was sweet with delicate perfume. It might have been a coming out party, or a reception to a notable. The sun caught diamonds on the hands of ancient ladies in black taffeta. It was an exclusive gathering of wealth and culture. Here and there the buzz of conversation was broken by little gasps of delight as a particularly beautiful treasure was unearthed from the collection.

Violette made no effort to join any group. Although she was the wife of the late Howard Lamont, and had received most of his fortune, she was as much a stranger as the sharp-eyed detectives who walked among the guests, guarding the display.

She was growing impatient. Why didn't the sale begin? When would the auctioneer—he seemed so ineffectual!—climb on the platform and begin to auction off the collection? Ah, how Violette would gloat at the pain on the old lady's face—the wistful pain on Mrs. Lamont's aristocratic face! They all had that look—Howard, Una, Mrs. Lamont—the look of a child who peers through a store window at a display of Christmas toys.

Where was the platform on which he would stand? Why, there was no platform to be seen!

This was like a bad dream, awry, contradictory. Violette grew suddenly sick. Her nerves were on edge. She trembled as if from a violent chill. She had thought that her troubles were over when Howard Lamont died, and here she was again in the same sick temper.

Tears came into her eyes. Through the blur she saw Una Lamont. She couldn't stand it another minute.

"Una!" she called. "Una!"

"Hello, Vi!" replied Una, briskly striding over.

Una was not in mourning. She wore her inevitable gray tweed suit, brown brogans, and a brown velvet tam pulled over her iron-gray bobbed hair.

"Are you ill, Vi?" she asked anxiously, noting the pallor on her sister-in-law's face.

"Of course not," Violette answered with asperity, regaining her composure. "I just wanted to know how you and—and—mother were."

"Thank you, we are all right."

Una waited for Violette to speak again.

Violette flushed. She could have spat in the whimsical, wrinkled, good-humored face, but she struggled for self-control.

"When is the sale to begin?"

"Begin? The sale is on, so to speak."

"But don't they auction things off, you know, like an auction sale?"

"Good Lord, no, child! Did you think we were going to have an East Side bargain sale? Ha, ha, ha!" Una threw back her well-shaped head, then caught herself apologetically. "Pardon me, Vi—I'm a brutal old maid. No, my dear, the sale is on. If some one particularly wants something, and it has not already been sold, he comes to a price with one of the auctioneers, do you see?"

"You mean they are bought quietly, like that?"

"Why, yes—this is a private sale. If anything is left over, it may be sent to some auction room, to be disposed of there, but I don't think anything will be left. You didn't suppose we would permit an auction to be held here? Oh, you naïve child!"

Again the full-throated laugh echoed through the room. Violette felt faint.

"We were going to permit—" The insolence of it! As if this was Una Lamont's auction!

"This is my auction—mine, mine," rang in Violette's ears over and over. "I arranged it!"

But had she? A terrible doubt crystallized in her mind. Now she knew why the executors had insisted on her hiring their auctioneer when she announced that she was going to sell the house and all its contents. Now she knew that she had been foiled, tricked! Little black spots danced before her eyes.

"Don't think we don't appreciate what you've done, though, Vi, because we do. It was very white of you to offer to sell the old place, so that we could buy back the furniture and belongings. You see, we didn't want all my brother's treasures to be left in the hands of strangers, and we were afraid that you would refuse to give them up."

Violette blazed, but kept her outward calm, too furious even to retort. Strangers! She was a stranger, eh? Well, even though they bought back the furnishings, the house was already sold for apartments—little two-by-four upstart apartments!

"Did you buy the furniture?" asked Violette, white-lipped.

"No—Mary Lamont did."

"Mary Lamont! Is she here?" cried Violette excitedly, forgetting her anger at the thought of seeing Howard's first wife.

"No, Mary isn't here. Her agents have practically bought the entire collection. As a matter of fact, only a few things—the things that Howard collected in the last three years of his life—are being sold. The rest will remain intact, just as they were during their life together."

Violette could scarcely control herself. Her eyes became bloodshot. Why had she stayed to be humiliated like this? If she had never known that her plans were to be frustrated like this, she would have been happy.

"You know," she said, with a last feeble effort to be haughty, and with a superior smile, "I have sold the house. It's going to be remodeled into apartments."

"Yes, I know you sold the house, but the agent must have misinformed you. Mary bought the house, too—didn't you know? She intends to leave everything exactly as it was. She will remodel their old suite so that the house will be exactly as it was when she was here."

Una looked at Violette's twitching face, and took her hand kindly.

"Don't think we don't appreciate your unselfishness in letting us get these things back," she went on. "I'm sure you don't begrudge the fact that Mary bought them. Oh, Vi, she has lived a living death these last three years! She's no longer young, and she's not well. This house means everything to her, and of course we're glad that the traditions of the old place will be preserved at least a little longer. Mary's soul is wrapped up in every beam of this house. Besides, dear, you got an awfully good price for everything."

She patted Violette's shoulder in her masculine way.

IV

How Violette managed to get out of the house she never knew. She was sweetishly nauseous, as if fighting off ether fumes. A

terrible roaring was in her ears. She nearly fell down the high brown stoop, but her chauffeur caught her and tenderly helped her into the limousine, where she fell back, trembling, into the cushions.

The chauffeur was alarmed. He stepped in beside her and supported her limp body with his broad shoulder as she slumped down into the seat.

"Please, madam, don't take on so," he pleaded. "I should think you'd be glad to get rid of that old house."

"I've been doped, Sanders," she sobbed, tears pouring from her eyes.

"That's all right," soothed the chauffeur, taking her hat off, so that her head could rest against his shoulder. "You'll be all right soon."

"No, no, you don't understand!" she cried hysterically. "They fooled me. The executors—" Her sobs shook her so that she could hardly speak. "They made me take their auctioneer, and Mary Lamont bought the furniture and the house, and I'm a nobody again!"

She was sobbing hysterically now, and Sanders, with an effort to stifle her loud sobs, pressed her face against his shoulder. She laid her head on his arm and wept into his sleeve.

"Their traditions are safe," she sputtered through her sobs. "Una said their traditions are safe, but I'm the goat, Sanders! They tricked me into selling all my things—the dirty aristocrats!"

The chauffeur soothingly patted her cheek, uttering sympathetic little sounds. Violette's sobs were lessened now, but she still clung to his strong arm.

"I should worry, Sanders!" she said finally, as she made ineffectual dabs with her wet handkerchief at her ruined complexion. "Drive me to my hotel. At least I'm Mrs. Howard Lamont. I've got his name. That means something, and they can't take it away from me. The name is mine, and I'm going to make it look like a ten-cent piece!"

She looked radiant as she smiled archly at the chauffeur. He slowly dropped her hand as he stepped out of the car. She was smiling at him happily.

"I'm all right now, Sanders," she assured him. "I've got the name, you see—Mrs. Howard Lamont. No one can take that from me!"

The chauffeur smiled slowly. A speculative look came into his eyes.

The Man Who Lost His Voice

THE ADVENTURE OF A YOUNG MARRIED WOMAN WHO WAS
TIRED OF HER HUSBAND'S BLUE PRINTS

By Winifred Duncan Ward

THEY got into a fist fight over who was the greater—Bernard Shaw or Shakespeare. Can you imagine anything sillier? That's my king."

"It was an accident, then?"

"Oh, yes—Fisher had his pipe in his mouth, and Schemm just knocked it down his throat. I hear Schemm was very decent about paying the hospital bill."

"Trupps played. Well, isn't he talking yet?"

"Not a word—can't speak above a whisper. There—our game! The doctors don't give him much hope. It's your deal."

"When Freddie Fisher loses his voice, he's lost his main asset, I'll say!"

There was a round of laughter.

"How can you laugh?" said Evelyn Gissing, playing her last diamond. "I think it's the strangest, saddest accident I ever heard of—to be wiped off the social mat like that, with no warning."

Her host laughed.

"Wiped off? You don't know him. Wait till you see him function. He'll be here any minute. You evidently don't know him."

No, she didn't know Fred Fisher, for he was not "one of the crowd" in this particular set of well bred, well dressed New Yorkers. Neither, for that matter, was she. There was something a little daring about Mrs. Gissing that set her apart—something that made Fisher's eyes narrow suddenly, when he came into the room, a moment later, and bowed his silent acknowledgment to introductions.

What she saw was a loosely built, thick-shouldered man of medium height, with cold, attentive, humorous gray eyes, set a

little too close together. He had thick wrists and strong, short fingers that curved back unexpectedly. As they closed on Mrs. Gissing's hand, she had a distinct desire that they should remain there just a fraction of a second too long; but they did not.

"Tea or a cocktail, old man? Atta boy—still game, I see! I thought maybe on account of your throat—"

They were all very nice to him, bantering him on his quick pantomime, and asking him questions which they answered themselves in the next breath; but his silence dominated their chatter, as silence often will. Mrs. Gissing found herself watching him with interest out of the corner of her eye. What was he thinking about, as he sat there accepting the barrage of gossip about people and events of the week? He laughed silently once or twice, and his eyes had an amused, friendly gleam.

"He can't be over thirty," she found herself cogitating; "but he looks as old as George."

George was Mrs. Gissing's husband, and they had been happily married for nearly two years.

When the party broke up and she rose, her alert senses were still occupied with this curious man who did not speak. Why?

She looked at him sidewise, under dropped lids. He had taken a seat across the room from her, with not even the usual glance of appreciation for her slender whiteness and the pleasant, girlish smile in her gray eyes.

She was an eager, hovering young thing, was Mrs. Gissing, used to much playful

homage and tender but always respectful consideration from the male sex. Here was a man who, after one glance, had seemed to forget instantly that she was in the room—and this in spite of the very special sympathy that her feminine heart felt toward gentlemen with lost voices.

Slightly piqued, she dropped her white parasol as she walked across the room. Fisher was whispering something, with explanatory motions of the hands, to his neighbor on the right; and although the parasol fell almost at his feet, he did not move a muscle. She saw his eyes drop to it and remain there, as if arrested in spite of themselves; but it was her host who leaped forward and handed her the parasol.

What strong, sinewy hands he had! His voice must be like that, too, and—she caught herself up mentally, as the car bore her homeward.

"Good Heavens, you idiot!" she said to herself. "Are you still thinking about that man?"

But her mind would not stop.

"How interesting it would be to flirt with a voiceless man!" it whispered to her slyly.

"Nonsense!" replied her vanity. "He doesn't amount to anything. Why, he didn't even look at you!"

II

THE Gissings' apartment was quite far uptown—in the Seventies, looking out over the park, and it was sunny and bright and large. It contained a canary in a cage, and an expensive tea table, and an equally costly little maid in a frilly apron, and the whole thing had the quality of Evelyn herself—a sort of affectionate gayety.

In the alcove, strewn with blue prints, was George's huge, solid mahogany desk. Over the blue prints, as she entered, stood George, struggling with the straps of a huge leather suit case.

"Got your toothbrush, darling?" Her practiced eye roamed through the contents of his bag. "Oh, you're taking the old stockings! Well, all right; but haven't you forgotten your blue prints?"

He straightened up heavily, whistling under his breath.

"Nope—saved 'em out to show you."

"Oh, yes!"

Evelyn's mind sank wearily to a dutiful level of interest. She was awfully sick of George's blue prints. She used to shut her

eyes and wish they would turn into Japanese prints right under his nose, with jugglers, and spotted deer, and misty mountains; but he wouldn't have liked that. George was not artistic—a fact that she hadn't seemed to notice until after they were married.

Underneath the affectionate smile with which she used to listen to his endless, laborious explanations of bridges and cantilevers and hoists, all done out in meaningless white lines on reams of blue paper, she used to catch herself saying under her breath:

"Damn his old blue prints! Damn them—damn them!"

"You see," he said, "here is the elevation I was telling you about last Thursday, and here is the ground plan."

"Oh, yes—and this is where the river runs underneath!"

"River?" He grinned at her patiently, adoringly. "This isn't a bridge I'm showing you, kiddie. This is a grain elevator. I'm afraid you'll never understand blue prints!"

"Well, neither will you ever understand a Schubert symphony!" Her voice snapped in spite of herself, but the next moment she was penitent. "Show me, dear—please!"

"Well, this is the elevation. Here are the parts. This is the belt conveyer that I've designed. You see, it moves the grain horizontally, and the dead weight of the moving parts is reduced to a minimum. Now all I've got to show them is that the power required is sufficiently small. My belt, thirty inches wide, will convey ten thousand bushels of grain per hour. Well, that's that!"

He snapped the crisp blue print into a tube and packed it.

"When will you be back?"

"On Saturday night, I hope. What are you doing to-night?"

"I'm having dinner and a dance with the Weirs. I'll write you to-morrow. Have you got your bedroom slippers? Don't forget to look up the Morrisons in Cleveland. Good-by, darling!"

When the front door had slammed on him, she stretched out her arms, threw back her head of loose pale gold curls, and sighed. A week of freedom—a week to cram full of art, and concerts, and dancing, and all the color of life that she needed and George didn't!

Telephoning for the car, she began to dress for her dinner engagement, whistling to the canary, and calling back and forth to the maid, who was cleaning the pantry. Suddenly she stopped, in the midst of her pretty, birdlike movements. What was she doing? She had put on the wrong dress—not the fluffy evening thing she had intended, but a pearl gray, clinging gown—almost a street dress, and very becoming, albeit impossible to dance in; and she was on her way to a dance. Why?

All of a sudden she knew. She had put on the pearl gray dress because she intended to stop the car where she had been playing cards in the afternoon, and pretend that she had lost something there; and she was doing this in the hope that the man with no voice would still be there, and that he would see her in this seductive gown and be fascinated.

Mrs. Gissing was nothing if not honest with herself, but she was deeply pained and surprised that her subconscious mind should play her such a trick. She was about to change back into her other gown when her eye caught something outside the window which made her stand motionless, half in her dress and half out of it.

Running along behind the apartment house was a little private garden, with benches here and there. It could be entered only through the house itself. Sitting with its back to her, on the bench directly under her window, was a quiet figure in a gray tweed suit. So silently and patiently it sat there that it might have been carved of stone—except for one strong, short hand that curved now and then around the bowl of a pipe. It was Fred Fisher!

Evelyn Gissing's heart gave a slight lurch, and then beat loudly in sudden, suffocating triumph. The man had had the audacity to follow her. To get into that garden, he must have rung some other apartment bell, and then slipped through. The conceit of him, to think she would look out of the window and see him! The egotism of him, to assume that if she did she would invite him to enter her home!

She felt deeply shocked, and at the same moment deeply certain that within the next ten minutes he would be in the room with her. Already her hands, quite without her conscious permission, were helping her back into the clinging gray dress. With a sort of stealthy eagerness she ran to the phone,

and told Mrs. Weir that she would not be able to dine with her that night.

All the while her heart fluttered at the strange, silent directness of this man. He *had* noticed her, then, and all his indifference had been just sheer cleverness! Well—

A dreadful thought assailed her. Could he possibly be waiting there for somebody else? After all, the apartment house was full of other people.

She stopped herself just in time from calling softly to him. How embarrassing if it should prove that he had some other errand! She would die of shame. She must find out!

With beating heart she hid behind her lace curtain—for all the world, she realized, like some silly schoolgirl—and screwed up her mouth for a soft, clear whistle. If he jumped to his feet, turned, saw her, smiled in radiant surprise, and bowed, then she would take a chance and ask him in. If, on the contrary, he just looked up and down, as if wondering where the noise had come from, then she would slip out, go to the dinner, and he would be none the wiser.

But he did neither. Hardly had a little whistle, far more timid and tremulous than she intended, sounded from her window, when he rose very quietly, knocked the ashes out of his pipe, took up his hat, and walked into the house, without once glancing up.

She stood staring in breathless surprise. He couldn't have heard—he was going away!

The next moment there came a step upon the stair, and one firm, single knock upon the living room door.

The spirit of gay adventure suddenly subsided in Mrs. Gissing. She felt a little frightened. After all, who was this man?

"Mary," she said soberly, "will you open the door, please?"

The next moment she was shaking hands with him—smiling, and explaining volubly.

"You know, I *saw* you sitting in the garden—and it seemed such a coincidence. You have friends here, I suppose?"

The chatter died on her lips. He looked at her with his narrow, smiling gray eyes.

"I have no friends here," he whispered. "I came to see you."

Seeming to think that everything necessary had been said, he sat down quietly, and continued to look at her. Her mo-

mentary fright died, and in its place surged all the wild, pent up desire for romance that two years of marriage had smothered.

"This man is fascinating!" said her romantic young girl's heart. "I want to flirt with him for a whole week—and I'm going to!"

Having made this declaration to herself, she suddenly felt very happy.

As a whispered conversation across the tea table was impossible, she came over impulsively and sat down beside him on the big divan. Somehow, before she knew it, she was telling him of her love for music and for pictures, and how bored she was—yes, really—with the bridge playing people who made up her life. Somehow she felt she could tell him this.

"You see," she chattered intimately, "they're really George's friends. Mine were so unconventional that we simply couldn't go on entertaining them after my marriage."

"How do you mean, unconventional?" he whispered.

"Oh, well, you know—arty without being artistic, and a little bit sloppy without having really done anything to excuse it."

Yes, he knew. New York was full of them. On the other hand, the others were dull by contrast.

"Perhaps," he whispered gravely, "the secret is to be yourself. Then life becomes real, and dangerous at times, and continually entertaining."

She thrilled at his understanding, at his flattering attention to everything she said, and at his appreciative silences, so much more eloquent than words.

"If you think it won't tire you too much," he whispered, "we might dine at my place—that is, if you are by any chance free."

Oh, yes, she was free! As they rolled in their taxi down, down, down toward Greenwich Village, where he lived, she found herself pouring into his bent ear all the eager, shy things she had wanted to say to George and somehow never could—just little intimate nothings that tumbled out of her mouth. He listened, silent, grave, with answering eyes.

III

THE taxi driver belonged to that peculiar genus who appear to have arrived in the great city the night before, from other worlds. He seemed to have heard of Fifth

Avenue, and Washington Square was a name that caused a faint flicker of intelligence in his dull eyes; but once below these landmarks his ignorance of New York proved abysmal. As Fisher was unable to make him understand anything in whispers, they finally got out and walked the five winding streets that still lay, he explained, between them and his "place."

Darkness had fallen. As they turned down the less frequented streets, he did something that no man had ever done to Evelyn before. Whenever they approached a curb, he stepped behind her quickly, and, taking her arms gently in his strong hands, he lifted her forward over the curb. The first time it was two-thirds a lift and one-third a caress. The next time he reversed these proportions—and all so quietly that the passers-by did not even notice. Pretty Evelyn Gissing laughed with pleasure—a gay, affectionate laugh which made him turn his head quickly and look at her.

The entrance to his "place" was romantic enough to satisfy even Evelyn—a little green door, halfway down a winding alley, and on the other side of the door a dark passage—a regular Arabian Nights passage. She put out her hands instinctively, and it was convenient, if not absolutely necessary, that he should take one of them, for at the end were two stone steps, down which she might have fallen if he hadn't lifted her down them bodily.

The passage opened unexpectedly into a square courtyard, with the lights of mysterious windows shining down into it. He pointed to one of the windows.

"My landlady's daughter," he whispered, "lives there."

He added nothing to this simple statement, but it seemed to give the scene a certain poignancy, as of a scene in grand opera, with all the characters mysteriously off stage.

Across the court—down another step—through a half open doorway into a long, low cellar room—and in the silence she felt, rather than heard, the door shut and lock behind her. Then the quick, sharp spurt of a lighted match—two candles blossomed in the dark, a lamp flickered into warmth under his steady hand, and suddenly Evelyn found herself face to face with something that made her cry out with pleasure and surprise.

Stretched across one end of the long room was a huge four-paneled screen—a

pale gold screen, glimmering there like a ghost. Silver stars showered down its sides, and across its face pale women drooped among strange flowers, or chased one another here and there, or lay flung out beneath the showers of silver stars.

"Oh!" she cried, with a sharp intake of breath.

"I knew you would like it!"

His whisper in the dark was a delicate caress. Something like a bubble of hope deep in her heart rose up, swelled to great size, and burst.

"What a relief!" she cried. "What an escape, after blue prints of bridges and grain elevators!"

"Blue prints?" She saw his level brows rise for a moment. He had taken a step forward, but he stopped now, as if checked by intuition. "Oh, of course!" he whispered gravely. "It's hard to remember that you are *Mrs. Evelyn*!"

He whispered her name with all its syllables separated, as if it were a string of pearls that he dropped one by one.

Making her comfortable in his biggest chair, he went behind the magic screen and with quietness and efficiency collected a simple meal of coffee and salad and fruit—always with his half apologetic silence, which he succeeded somehow in making quite charming. She followed him, at last, on one of his trips behind the screen.

"Do you mind? Men's cooking arrangements are always so amusing."

He had laughed at this, turning to her with that quick, restrained half caress she liked so much; but when she saw behind the screen, she gasped with genuine shock. Heaps of dirty dishes were piled there, with old rags, old shoes, and bags of food tossed everywhere—a veritable chaos.

"My dear man!" she cried. "Don't you ever wash these up?"

"I can't get it done," he whispered confidentially. "I never can remember to buy any soap."

"While you are getting the dinner," she said firmly, "I shall buy you some."

In spite of his whispered protestations, she slipped out bareheaded, and ran down the long, dark passage and out into the street, with him chasing her to the very door. At the nearest grocery she bought a huge bar of castile soap, a long-handled mop, and a pail. When the lamp flared up, she had seen in the corners of the room sights that made the housewife in her rise

up and shudder; but then the silver screen had blotted it all out.

IV

WHILE he prepared the simple dinner, she washed his dishes, singing softly, under her breath. As they drank their coffee, in the strange intimacy of his silence, he suddenly spoke in a low, husky voice that made her start.

"You see I can do it," he said, "but it hurts."

"Oh, don't, please! I love it when you whisper."

"When my voice comes back, I want to tell you about that screen. I had it made specially for this place. That's why I stay here, in spite of the dampness. I'm afraid it wouldn't look so well anywhere else. It's just right here, don't you think?"

"Oh, it's more than right!"

With her eyes on the vague woman that flickered in the candlelight, Evelyn suddenly remembered the bright, clean wholesomeness of her own apartment. How banal it must have looked to this artist in nuances!

She as much as said so, but he replied at once:

"Oh, no! That, too, has its charm."

It was a kind of charm which evidently did not interest him; yet how nice of him to appreciate its value, where George Gissing would always just take it for granted! Poor, one-sided George!

Evelyn had a sudden passionate desire to express her gay, whimsical, birdlike love of light and color in this dim place—to scour and scrub it by candlelight, and to keep the dishes clean and the dark corners sweet. What a pleasure it would be to play this simple game each day—with him!

As if reading her thoughts, he rose, before she could, and, going over to the piano which she had noted dimly in one corner, he sat down and began to play. Now she understood those hands that had baffled her with their pliability. Out of the partial darkness rolled Brahms, and Beethoven, and Debussy. His touch was a little hard, perhaps, but he could not be everything. She lay back lapped in happiness that he should have this hidden talent in answer to her desires.

"Don't stop!" she breathed. "You are an artist!"

He did stop, at that, genuinely pleased. Leaning over suddenly, he caught her hand in one of his strong ones. Pulling her to

her feet, he made her come and sit facing him on the wide piano bench, so that her back was to his hands, and, as he played again, he looked directly into her face close beside him.

"What a charming thing to do!" she laughed.

"What a charming thing to see!" he whispered back, with his gray, smiling eyes on hers. After that they said nothing, for he drifted suddenly into "Tristan und Isolde," and she was carried on to a misty gray sea, where warm waters swung her back and forth, and up and down, and a hot wind kissed her eyes, her mouth, her throat. How marvelous that he could play and at the same time kiss and kiss, like that!

She leaped from the piano stool, her closed eyes flying open in the half dark.

"Don't! Don't!" she cried. "Oh, I must go!"

Between her and the magic screen swam a picture of her husband—broad-shouldered, tired, laden with baggage, tumbling out alone on a crowded station platform, somewhere west of Cleveland.

"I must go!" she said again.

"Oh, must you?"

He had suddenly grown very polite, very quiet and attentive.

On the way home she talked nervously about nothing, and he was quite silent. A sudden panic seized her that she had in some obscure way offended him, and that she would never see him again.

"Tell me," she said abruptly, in the darkness of the taxi, "who are you?"

His whisper came instantly in reply:

"My father was a saloonkeeper. I come from a small town in Vermont—and you?"

How she liked the quiet dignity of that! His father kept a saloon, and he said it just as calmly!

"Oh, my father"—she laughed it off—"I'm afraid to tell you what an old blue-blood he was! I'm afraid you wouldn't associate with me any more!"

She could see him laugh in the dark.

"What are you doing for your throat?" she demanded, when they reached her door.

He made a gesture of despair, and there under the arc light she could see his steady eyes suddenly fill with angry tears.

"The doctors say," he whispered, "that it may never come back—or it may come back to-morrow. There is nothing they can do."

"Have you tried a mustard plaster?"

He smiled, and then laughed.

"No one but a married woman would have thought of that," he whispered in her ear.

"Yes, but *have* you?" She clutched at it eagerly—it was a wonderful excuse for seeing him again. "I'll come over and put it on you myself, if you'll only try it."

"That settles it," he whispered promptly; "but tell me"—his eyes narrowed on hers suddenly—"why are you doing this?"

"Because," she whispered, her voice a little unsteady, "I want to hear your voice."

"To-morrow night, then. I'll send a taxi."

He bowed gravely over her hand, and, turning, went away.

As she got ready for bed in her bright, clean, electric-lighted apartment, she found her thoughts curiously focused on one single subject—his voice. She wanted to hear it. Every inch of her wanted to hear it saying:

"Evelyn, will you leave him for me? Will you leave him for *me*?"

She turned out the lights and buried her head between two pillows.

V

DURING the week that followed, his silence came to mean more than speech. They saw each other every day, and she accepted almost with joy his whispered announcement that the doctor had warned him to stop even his whispering—it might irritate the vocal chords.

This made it impossible for him to give the music lessons by means of which he lived, so their time was their own. Every afternoon he would appear, with his grave, attentive air, in which she detected a sort of mute gratitude to her for her willingness to chatter on gayly to him and expect no answer.

She became sure, with a terrible, creeping certainty, that Fred Fisher was the man she should have married. Did he know it, too? He had the air of waiting patiently for her to make some move; and she became more and more desirous of making it—of saying to him some rash, irrevocable word that would change the course of her life forever.

His steady, humorous eyes, watching her as she moved around the room, seemed to say louder than any protestations:

"I'm waiting, my dear! I'm waiting!"

One afternoon, as they sat together on the couch, having tea, a neighbor's child, with whom Evelyn Gissing played occasionally, saw her. The door being open, the little girl ran in and threw her arms prettily around Evelyn's neck.

Fisher smiled. Seeing his eyes so friendly, the little girl leaned across from Evelyn's lap and offered him, where he sat beside them, a bite of her stick of candy.

Glancing up at that moment, Evelyn stared, spellbound.

"Look!" she said, putting her hand on Fisher's knee.

Opposite them was a mirror, and in it the three of them were reflected—the blond, stooping man, with his narrow eyes, Evelyn, with her pale gold hair, and the child, sprawled across their laps. The child was blond, too.

Did he see what she saw? Their two pairs of eyes met in the mirror.

The next afternoon, gathering together all her courage, she took the little girl, whose name was Barbara, over to his "place" without letting him know that she was coming.

He was there alone, playing Brahms, in his shirt sleeves. He received the child a little coldly, she thought, considering what had passed the day before. She sensed that he was not used to children. However, she liked the quick way in which he thought of something for Barbara to do. He was always quick, she noted, to meet any situation.

Scraping off some of the big cake of soap she had given him, he made soap bubbles, and, taking Barbara between his knees, blew them on his old pipe. Then, at the last moment, he blew the smoke of a lighted cigarette into each one, until it became a quivering, pale blue opal that sank and floated through the air. The game was charming—perfect. Evelyn laughed aloud at the sheer joy of being there with him in this enchanted, silent way.

At last one of the bubbles drifted against the screen, blown there by Barbara. It burst, with a little splotch of water and soapsuds, against the breast of one of the shadowy white women.

"Oh, look, look—how lovely!" cried Evelyn.

Fisher had whipped out his handkerchief with a look of sudden, concentrated concern. The screen was painted with water

colors, and the bubble had melted and blurred the outline of the slender lady.

"I'm so sorry!" she said. "Do you mind?"

He looked at her with his quick smile. How poignant his silence was! It called to her across space. How much more poignant, she felt, his voice must be!

She gave him a housecleaning that afternoon. Every piece of furniture was moved. Every damp corner that might infect his throat was soaped and scoured and dried by her eager, affectionate hands. When it was over, and he was allowed to come out of his corner at the piano, where he had watched her with silent, smiling eyes, he slipped up behind her, and, taking her arms, lifted her gently over an imaginary curbstone.

"Dear!" she said, thrilling to his touch. "Dearest!"

At that he turned her around in his arms.

"Yes?" he whispered, as if waiting for something.

"George comes home to-night!"

She waited, eager, palpitating, for his reply; but he said nothing at all. He only held her closer, with a sort of affectionate patience. Was it love, or chivalry, or both, that she read in his eyes? Surely their longing had grown, during this poignant week, to a point where sharing this strange room together, and turning it somehow into a home, was the only possible finale! She felt it. She knew he felt it; but how to begin?

"Will you be home to-morrow night?" she asked abruptly. "Don't come for me. I'll taxi down."

All the way home her heart sang. How she would take care of him—poor, lonely, uncomplaining dear! How she would work to make amends for that tragic lost voice! It was really up to her—she saw that now. Even with a voice, he would not have spoken until she could say:

"It's all right—George has let me go!"

Her mind failed to think any further than this.

Arriving, she found a telegram:

Delayed—Be home 12 P.M.—Don't wait up.
GEORGE.

She felt a surge of relief. Five hours to think things out!

She dismissed the maid and got her own dinner. She wanted to be alone; but after she had achieved solitude, she couldn't de-

cide what would be the proper thing to say to George. She tried to outline it.

"You see, dear, I appreciate you—how big and solid and good you are—but it just isn't enough. There's a whole world of beauty you don't know anything about—I want that—you see, I just want that more than anything. Oh, please let me go!"

These arguments raced around and around in her brain. She grew tired and a little feverish with excitement. It was ten o'clock. Then, as if by magic, it was eleven. She had been sitting in the dark for two hours.

Restlessly she lit the bright electric lights. The canary, which she had forgotten to cover, woke up and began to sing cheerfully. She couldn't bear its singing. She ached to be down there with Fred. Perhaps he was alone, too—sitting there, voiceless, playing "Tristan" in the dark.

It was too much! There was an hour yet. She must see him—must get a whispered word of encouragement—an assurance that everything was all right. She knew it was childish, but she called a taxi and went, stopping at a shop on the way to buy him a quart of ice cream. He liked it, for it cooled his throat.

As she crossed the courtyard, her heart sank. No light in his window! Perhaps he was out! but, yes—there were voices—a man's voice, and then another man's voice, and then a woman's. He had visitors.

Surely they would go soon. It was half past eleven now. Stepping into the dark corner of the courtyard by his window, Evelyn made up her mind to wait there. She was so sure that he would understand, and that he wouldn't have wanted her to stand in the street.

She could see two cigar ends. Two men were sitting in the dark, smoking.

"Oh, go soon!" she prayed.

It gave Evelyn a strange feeling of intimacy with him, to be waiting there. They had always been alone together, and it was almost a surprise to find that he had acquaintances, just like everybody.

The woman was talking.

"You could 'a' knocked me over with a feather. In he walks, and hands mother the rent, and says 'Good morning, Mrs. Evans!' just as loud and clear as if he'd never lost it!"

A man's voice spoke.

"You don't want to use it too much, old man. Might lose it again."

"Oh, I don't know! I've had it back four days now. That's a pretty good test."

Evelyn Gissing stood motionless in the dark, every nerve strained.

That was *his* voice—that cold, amused, rather pleasant barytone—*his* voice—she was hearing it at last! Later—it seemed to her a long time afterward—the import of the words that it had spoken reached her brain:

"I've had it back four days now."

Her groping mind stopped short. The voice—*his* voice—was speaking again.

"You know, I honestly believe," it said, "that if it hadn't been for the little Gissing, I'd have got it back sooner. She was forever making me whisper to her."

"Where is she, anyway? You having a night off?"

It was the woman who spoke.

"Her husband's back. I guess she'll cool off now."

"Well, you can let me know when the coast is clear again."

A chair scraped. The same cool voice replied:

"The coast's always clear for you, *chérie!*"

"Yea, well, I don't butt in on your lady friends. You got to hand it to me for *that*, Freddie!"

They came out, all three of them, into the courtyard, passing so near Evelyn Gissing that she could have put out her hand and touched Fisher and the other man. Not the other woman—she couldn't have touched *her*, no matter how close she stood. Some instinct told her that this broad-hipped girl, only half seen in the dim light, was the landlady's daughter.

When they came to the two little steps up into the passage, Fisher stepped behind the girl, and, taking her arms in his strong hands, lifted her over.

Evelyn fought down the sickness that rose up to overwhelm her. In the dark, her little sensitive chin was held up proudly. The ice cream, clutched to her side, was cold against her heart.

"Don't run away!" she said to herself, with her teeth biting into her cheek to keep from crying. "Don't run away! He's only the son of a saloon-keeper!"

VI

WHEN Fisher lit his candles, some ten minutes later, he found her sitting there, upright, beside his piano. Being by no

means a stupid man, he saw at once that something was the matter. Instead of speaking, he stood still, half smiling and very attentive, and waited for her to speak.

"Have you lost your voice again?" she said finally.

He smiled—alert, but still mystified.

"Can I make you some coffee?" he ventured.

"No. Sit down, please." She remained where she was, proud, motionless. "I overheard everything you said. I have stayed because I want to know why you didn't tell me, four days ago, what you are really like. Will you tell me now?"

He looked across at her with his thoughtful, narrow eyes. She saw for the first time how cold they were—like his voice, like his touch on the piano.

"Yes, I'll tell you," he said pleasantly.

"I'd gone to a lot of trouble establishing a certain atmosphere, and I thought possibly, if I kept things going in the same key, you might, in the end, come through."

Come through! The phrase smote her like some vulgarism in a foreign tongue. Seeing her confusion, he added patiently:

"Of course, I knew I was probably wasting my time. One usually does, with you married women."

She fought down the faintness that was again assailing her.

"May I ask," she said steadily, "how many women have been played to in the dark here, and have been kissed against the gold screen, and have been lifted over curbstones, and have sat silent with you in the candlelight—"

Her voice broke, but his was steady as steel.

"Oh, I should say a dozen or so—but then, you see, I've had so many basement studios, in so many cities!"

"You carry the gold screen with you?"

He smiled at that, good-naturedly.

"Oh, yes!" he said. "No amour is entirely picturesque without my screen. You see, I had it specially painted."

She faced him squarely.

"What did you mean when you said that you thought I wouldn't come through?"

"Because, like all married women, you are a poacher."

She gasped. The man sitting opposite to her was a complete stranger, and yet how horribly familiar were those eyes—those hands!

"I mean," he explained patiently, "since

you've asked me to be frank, that you all like to have a little emotional debauch on the side, once in a while, but you don't want to pay for it."

"But I would have come to you—I was coming—I was going to tell George to-night that I—"

She caught herself up, crimson at having defended herself thus.

At the name of "George," Fred Fisher looked up sharply.

"Well, that's the most cold-blooded thing you've done yet! Do you mean to say you'd have got me in wrong with your husband for the sake of such an affair? Why, you had a whole week when he was out of the way, and you wasted it!"

They stared at each other across an abyss.

"I wish you would tell me," she said, when she could control her voice, "just what you've been thinking about me—this last week."

His eyes dropped for the first time.

"Oh, no!" he said. "Please!"

The implication was insulting, but she steeled herself.

"Yes—go on—tell me. I want to know."

His narrow, friendly eyes met hers again.

"All right—it's up to you!"

He rose and lit his pipe, forgetting, she noticed, even to offer her a cigarette. Settling down in his chair, he moved the candle so that it did not shine in his eyes.

"I sized you up that first night as a quitter—the night you wouldn't stay, after my whispering myself hoarse to get you interested; but I took a chance and hung on. I've had women play shy up to the last minute, and then come through. You never can be sure. Besides, I was interested in your type. You know, you married women have an awful nerve. You always play safe—that's what I hate about you. You get some poor devil to slave his life out supporting you and protecting you with a marriage license, and then you seem to think you can fool around and soak up the admiration of all the other men, and never give them a thing for their trouble. If they catch on, and cool off, then you pull the marriage stuff on them. Why, I have more respect for that girl who was in here to-night! She gives what she's got to give, and lets it go at that. She earns her own living and lets the men earn theirs—and that's more than your kind have the de-

cency to do. Why, I wouldn't live with you on a bet—if that's what you've been thinking! You don't know how to let a man alone."

"What do you mean? Go on!"

"Well, what was the very first thing you made me do? You made me whisper—the worst thing for my voice. Then, when I wouldn't do that any more, you had to do something to amuse yourself, I suppose, so you began changing my place around. Why couldn't you let things alone, instead of slopping around with water on my floor, leaving that vile smell of soap everywhere? It took me hours to get it out after you left. That was a horrible brand of soap you bought. Then you brought that kid over here, and almost ruined one of the panels of my screen."

Here Fisher's voice shook with real resentment.

"Then you would put that damned mustard plaster on me. I've been cold-creaming my chest ever since, and it's raw yet. Of course, I realize you didn't know my voice was back all that time. Just the same, a man doesn't want to be deviled like that. I suppose marriage gives you those bad habits; but what did I get out of it? That never seemed to occur to you. You just go on having a good time at my expense—and I can't see, when you don't come through with the goods, what in the dickens you get out of it. Then, when a man gets fed up, your feelings are hurt, and you get emotional, and go running back to your husbands with all sorts of stories!"

"What were you thinking," she said slowly, "the day when little Barbara climbed in between us, and you looked at me in the mirror, and smiled?"

He turned his head, in the quick way he had when he was surprised, and looked at her.

"How should I know? That was a week ago. I suppose I was worrying about my voice. It hadn't come back then."

"You didn't think—anything—about Barbara?"

"No—not that I can remember. Why?"

"Oh, nothing!" said Mrs. Gissing.

She rose. A telephone began to ring insistently on the next floor, and Fisher became alert.

"Will you excuse me just a minute?" he said politely. "I *think* that's the man about my screen. He's going to give me

an estimate on having a brass edge put around it, to protect it. I'll be back."

He went up the stairs two at a time, and she could hear him talking earnestly into the phone in his cool but rather nice voice.

She turned and looked at the screen—with surprise. What was the matter with it? It seemed to have changed.

The little white ladies still flickered across it in the candlelight, and the silver stars still showered down among the flowers; but the flowers were twisted and morbid, and the little women—how unhealthy they looked! There were too many of them—yes, decidedly too many of them!

She turned her head sharply and listened.

"Yes," his voice was saying into the phone. "I think a brass band about three inches wide. I don't want any nails put in the screen."

Leaving the quart of ice cream to melt unseen on the window sill, Evelyn darted to the sink. Yes, there it was—the cake of soap she had bought for him! There were the mop, and the pail, still full of dirty water! Quick, quick! Dip the mop in, and get it full of thick, dirty water! Smear it down the center of each panel, where the pale ladies lay waiting!

Back again into the pail—sop, splash! Dirty water in thick gray rivers among the silver stars! Now the flowers were coming off in mottled streaks! Now for the ladies—must get their hair off! Now the whole screen ran together, like a Pompeian frieze half gone. It was just a blur of mud and stars and paint smudging into lumps.

She left the mop in the middle of the floor and went out, not even hurrying across the moonlit courtyard. She could hear his clear, decisive voice as she went down the dark passage.

"All right!" it said. "I'll look for you the first thing in the morning. It has four panels, don't forget!"

VII

GEORGE was leaning over blue prints when she entered—a big solid bulk in the middle of their bright apartment. On the tea table lay his bag, bursting with things half taken out. His dear old pipe was in his mouth.

"Home!" said everything in the bright, friendly room. "Home!"

There was the tea set that they had picked out together. There hung the little bird cage that he had brought her on her

birthday. There on the floor were the wool-lined bedroom slippers with which he had been so pleased, because they were her first gift to him.

"Kiddie!" said he, when her burst of kisses and little inarticulate murmurings was over. "I've got a surprise for you. You know that thirty-inch belt for the elevator?"

"Yes, dear!" How sweet he was, after all! How like a big, efficient boy! "Yes?"

"Well, those people in Detroit seem to be just crazy about it. Look what they gave me!"

He pushed something into her hand with clumsy shyness. It was a draft on a New York bank for ten thousand dollars.

"I thought we'd take this money," he said, "and run around for a year or so—meet some people—see life!"

"And leave our home and—and all this?"

She looked about her, vaguely distressed.

"Yes, deary, I know. I'd like to stick right here, but it's you I'm thinking of. You ought to have the things you want—music and paintings and all that stuff. You ought to have some adventures. I can't talk art, and I don't know the kind of fellows who can, but I can pay your railroad fare while we run around and look for some, eh? What do you say?"

Evelyn Gissing hugged his thick, square head thoughtfully against her breast, but she said never a word.

Eden Valley

A DOUBTFUL EPISODE IN THE TRIUMPHANT MARCH OF MODERN PROGRESS

By Chandler P. Barton

A BRIGHT red roadster hummed up the long grade from the Mojave Desert into the mountains, its varnished and nicked splendor appearing and disappearing around the turns like the sun behind scattered clouds. As it reached the summit, the humming changed for a moment to a contented purr. Then Mr. Garford put on the brakes, turned the switch, and, removing his cap to let the breeze cool the red band across his forehead, looked back over the country from which he had come.

Three or four lean steers and a vulture that hovered over some unseen carcass were the only living things, on this side of the range, within many miles. Heat waves wriggled loose from the dazzling sand. Garford saw yucca trees, like grizzled prospectors, searching in vain for a drop of water, and dry, brown hills like crumpled parchment. He recalled the prospectus of the new irrigation project, and in imagination the desert was packed like a tapestry

with farms and little towns. Then he walked to the edge of Eden Valley, from which the water was to be diverted to work this miracle.

It was inclosed by verdure-clad hills, as if by the ivy-grown walls of a monastery. A waterfall, shaped like the beard of an Assyrian king, fell from a crevice into a sparkling stream that meandered, between groves of great oaks and sycamores, to a sapphire lake. Grass and wild flowers were thrown carelessly like velvet and brocade cloaks over the whole floor. On a terrace sloping gently to the water a cream-colored hacienda, with deep rose roof, sprawled dreamily in the sun.

Garford made a terse address to heaven. He had expected to find a rocky, uncultivated river bottom, and a tumble-down shack inhabited by a lazy old Mexican and his fat, barefooted daughter. He had a healthy contempt for foreigners of the lower orders. To dispossess the Don Alfonso he had pictured would have been a simple

and congenial task; but aristocrats awed him, and Eden Valley might have been the seat of a duke.

As he looked toward the head of the fall, where the water was to be turned down the other side of the range, he reflected that within a few months Eden Valley would resemble the inside of a rusted kettle, and a mild sadness came over him. Then he remembered his thousand shares of Sierra Nevada Land and Water Company stock, and his thoughts returned to the slogans of the pioneers, which he had learned in his school days. "Westward the course of empire takes its way" was one of these stereotyped phrases. "Manifest destiny" was another.

"That's it," said Garford. "It's too bad, but it's manifest destiny."

The old wagon road was unworthy of his car, so he returned, pulled an imitation leather portfolio from under the seat, and started on foot down the steep descent into the valley.

The lake sparkled like a spangled dress under a spot light. As he walked along the shore, grasshoppers jumped from beneath his feet and tried to divert him from the path. Butterflies, like wind-blown petals, fluttered from the flowers. Frogs croaked among the clumps of reeds at the water's edge.

A promontory, from the end of which a bowed cypress peered across at the distant hills, hid from view what lay beyond. When Garford came to its base, he looked down a winding green tunnel, and at its other end he saw a pleasant cove, where a little boat, with furled saffron sails, languidly spanked the water.

From this cove extended a broad, curving path, and between tree trunks and the shafts of tall palms could be seen sections of the house and a belt of vermilion flowers that bordered it. About halfway to it, some steps led to a terrace partly inclosed by a mossy stone balustrade. In the center stood a grilled iron well, girdled with ferns, and overhead the sky was screened by a dense filigree of leaves.

Garford stopped, took a drink from an old wooden cup, and then walked on until he stood before the great oak door.

Here he stopped again, to prepare his entrance. He wanted to meet this novel and unexpected situation successfully. He was still a little uncertain of the justice of the case. Soon, however, he decided that

the old fellow was probably in financial difficulties. Those Spaniards never had any idea of how to run a ranch profitably, and in all likelihood he was really doing Don Alfonso a favor.

Thus comforted, he lifted and dropped the massive knocker. In a few moments the door slowly opened, and a white-clad servant admitted him to the hall. He looked up at the arched ceiling, with its pendent lamp, and through the leaded windows at the fountain and bright tiles of the court.

On a stand before the windows roosted a macaw, whose brilliant plumage might have served as a palette for an illuminator of some old manuscript. Garford stuck a finger at the bird, which replied with an insulting squawk, and then he followed the servant into the library.

II

THERE the master sat, dreaming over a venerable Latin tome bound in yellowed vellum. When his guest entered, he laid his book on a worm-eaten table, rose, and extended a thin, transparent hand. Garford grasped it heartily.

"I'm Garford, the representative of the Sierra Nevada Land and Water Company," he said.

The old don greeted him quietly, and motioned him to a tall chair with seat and back of taut brown leather. Garford sat down with the air of an awkward school-boy, looking around at the family portraits and the wall of books below them.

"Beautiful place you have here," he ventured at last. "I suppose you'd hate to give it up?"

"It is all I have, Señor Garford," Don Alfonso answered. "My family once owned half of southern California. All our possessions, except Eden Valley, have been taken from us by the Americans."

"I admit," said Garford, "that's one of the great drawbacks of progress—a few always have to suffer. I look at it this way—it's all a question of the greatest good of the greatest number. When you get right down to it, the glory of the old days was mostly imagination. Take Los Angeles, for instance. Fifty years ago it was a little pueblo, and now it's a city of almost a million people."

The old man gazed thoughtfully out through the grilled windows at the sunny waters of the lake.

"Numbers," he said, "do not greatly impress me."

"You must believe, though," returned Garford, "in bettering the conditions of people." He opened his portfolio and took out a map. "I agree with you," he continued, drawing his chair beside the old don, "that there are a lot of evils connected with city life. In fact, that's exactly what I came to see you about."

Don Alfonso made no answer. Garford unfolded the map and spread it across the arms of the chairs. The salesman was now uppermost, and his embarrassment was gone.

"Let me show you," he said, "what we are planning to do." Eden Valley was buried under a heavy, square forefinger. "Here," he began, "is where we are now, and over there is the Mojave Desert. Today, except for a few cactus trees, it is as bare as a bone; but with water it can be transformed into one of the beauty spots of the world."

Don Alfonso turned his deep brows on the enthusiast at his side.

"Can it really?"

"Yes, sir!" said Garford. "Our engineers know that by diverting the river that runs through Eden Valley, and building a dam, they can reclaim, for the good of humanity, thousands of acres."

"But the river is mine," replied Don Alfonso. "Without it Eden Valley would perish."

"Think," boomed Garford, "of the increased wealth it will mean to the State! It has been conservatively estimated that the value of the irrigated land will increase a hundred times."

"What of that?"

"Why"—he searched a moment for words—"it will be a boon to mankind. People who have been imprisoned in flats and apartments all their lives will have, probably for the first time, a home of their own."

Don Alfonso laid his hand on the vellum and idly fingered it.

"Well, what of that?"

Garford spoke with deep feeling.

"Think," he said, "of the little children who will be able to play among the flowers and trees and regain their health and color in God's sunshine. Statistics prove that the death rate is—"

"Beauty," Don Alfonso interrupted gently, "is a finer thing than life."

Garford sat forward in his chair, and the square forefinger hovered threateningly.

"Beauty!" he said. "This will be the garden spot of California!" His hand went into the portfolio and brought forth beauty in the concrete. "Look at those!" He handed Don Alfonso pictures of a cement electrolier, a nondescript cottage, and a square two-story building with plaster curlicues on top. "And these aren't just isolated examples," concluded Garford. "These are typical. The whole desert will be covered with them!"

The old don glanced at the pictures and silently returned them. Garford put them back into the portfolio, and moved his chair to the opposite side of the table.

"I admit," he said, "that they're not as beautiful as your place here; but the old days are gone, when the few could live off the cream of the land while the people starved. You have to think of the good this project will do—of the thousands who will be benefited. We are really performing a duty to humanity. You must remember, Mr. de Lovieda, that the world is advancing nowadays."

"H-m!" said Don Alfonso. "Is it? I wonder!"

"Sure it is!" affirmed Garford. "Take those old fellows, for instance." He indicated, with a nod, the portraits which looked through a haze of dust and cracks from their dull gold frames. "They were probably brave men, and I admit that stories about them make good reading; but when you come right down to it, what good did they do?"

"Good?" said the old man. "I don't know that I have thought of that; but I believe that at least they were honest with themselves."

"I'm not sure that I quite get that last," Garford answered.

He looked from the old don to the picture, over the mantel, of a soldier with magnificent uptwired mustachios, and on his breast a jeweled cross.

"What did he do?" he asked.

"He won that cross at Malta, where with a handful of followers he held a fort against a regiment of Turks."

"That," said Garford, "I can understand very well."

"He did a still greater thing," continued the don. "On returning to Spain, he lost his life in a duel for the honor of a lady whom he knew only by name."

Garford scratched his chin.

"Who was that one next to him?" he asked.

"His Grace the Duke of Ortega. Through a court intrigue his lands were taken from him, and he was banished for twenty years. He went to Flanders, and, disguising himself, joined the army as a common soldier, and was killed on the battlefield. His grandmother hangs there to the left. She gave herself to a corsair captain to ransom her husband from slavery, and then took poison because she had been untrue to him."

Garford rose, and went to the picture of a tight-bodied, fair-haired girl with wistful, sad eyes. Then he returned to his seat, and half heard Don Alfonso continue the stories of the portraits.

There was a priest, taken by the Moors, who was offered his life and freedom if he would acknowledge Mohammed. His answer was a prayer to his God—cut short by his captor's sword.

There was an explorer scalped by Indians while in quest of the fountain of youth. There was a sea captain who had scuttled his ship rather than be captured. All had fought and given their lives for their king and their God. The old don's speech was a history of Spain and of the glory of chivalry, woven around the life of a great family. In that secluded library the past, it seemed, was speaking for itself.

Outside, the vermilion sun rose slowly, like a bright balloon, behind the reflected hills. Shadows, like an army of snails, crept across the floor and walls, and the servant came with a taper, to light the candlelabrum over the wide stone fireplace. Garford groped for a reply.

"Those were great times, all right," he said at last. "I'll agree with you that they don't make many men like those old cavaliers nowadays."

"Yet there," said Don Alfonso, "is my favorite ancestor."

He indicated a gentle and kindly old man, quietly dressed in black velvet and white linen.

"What did he do?" asked Garford.

"He lived in a small villa near Biarritz, overlooking the Bay of Biscay. He married a good and beautiful woman, and with her raised four children, each worthy of their name. He spent his days in peace and study, and died with a heart full of kindness and sympathy for all mankind."

In the old man's eyes was a mellow shining. In the flickering candlelight the pictures seemed, for a moment, to come to life. A cavalier, in lace and silken ruffles, caressed his sword. A bishop opened his lips to pray. A prince lifted and lowered his scepter. A haughty lady raised her eyes. Then, framed in the crimson and gold velvet of the door hangings, appeared the full-length portrait of a lovely girl.

"My daughter, Conchita," said Don Alfonso. "You must have dinner with us, *señor*. Perhaps Conchita can help us to resolve our differences."

The young man bowed, and the servant showed him to a wash room.

III

At dinner the salesman in Garford was completely submerged. He was used to the gaudy luxury of hotels and cabarets, but the epicurean dignity of Don Alfonso's table was new and strange. He looked mutely down at his food, occasionally raising his eyes to survey the long, dark table. In the center, like an island, stood an amethyst bowl filled with violets and mignonne, guarded by four tall beacons. Around the island the Taliaveri dishes floated like gay water lilies, and along the shores were moored small silver boats.

When the girl spoke, to break the constrained silence, Garford would glance for a moment at her indigo eyes, which caught the light like great star sapphires, and at the delicate texture of her skin. Then, as a dark hand appeared before him to remove his plate, he would look up with a start to the silent servant.

When the meal was finished, they returned to the library, where Conchita sat at the piano and began a delicate movement of a Mozart sonata. As she played, a persimmon-colored moon rose and sat like a great brooding Buddha on the top of the distant hills. Then the music changed to the light, sophisticated strains of Debussy. The moon shrank to a bowl of molten gold and silver, which poured its endless contents into the glistening lake. The valley was peopled with the gallant lords and ladies of an eighteenth-century pastoral.

Don Alfonso quietly left the room, and Garford moved his chair toward the girl. As she finished and looked up, the visitor crossed his legs, and, with his head thrust slightly forward, leaned back in his chair.

"Don't you ever get lonely away out here?" he asked.

"I don't know," Conchita answered hesitantly. "Why do you ask?"

"It's so far from the world. It's the most beautiful place I have ever seen. In fact, I've never even dreamed of anything like it; but I should think living here would be like living in a story book. Everything is so quiet, and kind of mysterious. It doesn't seem real!"

"It does seem out of the world at times," answered the girl; "but Eden Valley is very dear to father, and I couldn't think of leaving him."

"Suppose, though," said Garford, "you were to have a little house near the city. He could have all his books and things, and fix it up just the same inside, and you wouldn't be so isolated."

"It would break his heart." Conchita was vaguely worried. "Eden Valley is really part of him."

Garford rose and drew another chair beside his own. As the girl took it, he asked:

"Did your father tell you of our plans for reclaiming the desert?"

"Yes," said Conchita. "Father has always lived in a world of his own, and I am afraid he wasn't interested."

"Nevertheless, it's a wonderful thing, almost like a fairy tale." The young man drew one leg into his chair, and turned to face her. "Think," he said, "of a city rising right out of the desert, just by means of water which now, you might say, is practically going to waste!"

"You make us seem rather selfish," said Conchita thoughtfully.

"I wouldn't say that exactly," Garford answered. "I do think, though, that your father didn't fully appreciate the proposition we made him."

"Father shares the prejudices of his family against business. You would have to explain anything of that nature very carefully."

"I know," agreed Garford. "That's what I gathered from our conversation; but here's the way the matter lies. His title to this land is a Spanish grant, and no court in the country would uphold it."

"Surely you wouldn't take our old home away from us?"

"No," said Garford. "I believe, though, in looking the facts in the face, we could. I didn't tell your father this, because I could see how it would hurt him."

The pendant at the throat of an old Dutch clock rocked rhythmically back and forth. Conchita looked silently into her lap.

"There isn't any other place you could get water?" she said presently.

"Not within a hundred miles."

"Perhaps the company would be willing to wait a year or so?"

"No," said Garford. "They're nearly a month behind schedule now; and that would only postpone the problem. Besides, they might not be willing to make you as good an offer then."

For a while Conchita seemed to be telling the amber beads at her throat.

"It seems inevitable, doesn't it?" she said, at last.

"It's the best thing, too. Your father is getting old. Suppose something should happen to him away out here?"

"I've often thought of that," said Conchita. "I may as well confess that it is lonely here, too. Do you know that before to-day I hardly have met any one of my own age?"

Inwardly Garford expanded as if he had been awarded an order of merit. For reply he gave an incredulous mumble.

"And think of being able to go shopping, and to dances, and to the theater!" the girl went on.

"Surely—that's the way to look at it! It isn't as if you couldn't go to the country, either. Within half an hour you can get to the country clubs. Within an hour you would no more know you lived in the city than if you were here."

"Then there would be swimming and horseback riding, too. She looked at him wistfully. "Of course, I have those here, but it is not quite the same thing to swim and ride by yourself."

Garford resolved that the next day he would learn to ride a horse. In imagination, he was cantering with Conchita along a secluded bridle path, or facing her across a table at a country club or a hotel.

"Would you like to talk it over for a day or so with your father?" he suggested.

Her expression told him that he was the most kind and considerate man on earth.

"I hate to make you come away out here again—"

Mr. Garford scorned such a trifling matter, and rose to leave.

"If there is anything else, be sure to let me know."

Conchita gave him a small, cool hand and what he considered, at the moment, the loveliest of all possible smiles.

"Thank you so much!" she said."

IV

THE letter which Garford received from Conchita said that her father had consented to give up Eden Valley, and asked him to come the next day to make the final settlement. His imagination again got under way. He pondered the problem of taking her flowers or candy when he called. Then he reread the letter and held it to his nose. It was not perfumed.

"She's a fine girl!" he murmured. "A mighty fine girl—sensible, too!"

The next afternoon, when Garford arrived at Eden Valley, Conchita met him at the door. He felt that if he dared to take her in his arms, everything of importance in the world would be inclosed within the circle. Dressed in a delightful concoction of cream and gold, she was as hard to keep one's hands off as the coat of a Persian kitten, and about her were all the softness and the freshness of the valley.

But as she greeted him, and gave him her hand, he noticed that she was sad and troubled. Although she seemed pleased to see him, he felt that something had built a wall between them. He inquired for Don Alfonso, and she told him that she was extremely anxious about her father. The don complained of no sickness or pain, but a strange lethargy had come over him. When he was spoken to, his eyes had the pathetic look of a child whose feelings have been hurt. Garford felt a mixed emotion of sympathy and resentment.

When they went into the library, the old man was drowsing, as colorless and lifeless as a daytime moon. Garford thought, grotesquely, of empty eggshells, of an insect carcass sucked dry by an enemy.

Don Alfonso's hands, which rested on the opened pages of a great book, seemed scarcely more than a rumpling of the paper. As the young man spoke to him, he looked up with dull eyes, as deep-set as the empty sockets of a blind man. He gave no sign of recognition to either Garford or his daughter. Leaving him, they decided to take a walk to the lake, and not to disturb him until dinner.

On returning, it was necessary to press the old man's arm and speak to him several times, to rouse him. At the table he sat

silent, with his eyes cast down. From time to time Garford looked up, hoping to attract the girl's attention, but all the while she intently watched her father.

As each course was brought, Don Alfonso tasted it and pushed away his plate, until a meat covered with chili sauce was served, when the old man laid down his fork and wiped his mouth.

"Father," said Conchita, "aren't you well this evening? You don't seem to have any appetite."

"It's not that," said her father. "There's no taste to anything. I think the cook has forgotten his seasoning."

Garford, who had been alternating every second mouthful with water, looked up in surprise.

"Why, I thought things tasted the same as usual," the girl said.

"Did you, dear?" Don Alfonso spoke wearily, indifferently. "Well, possibly I have a little cold. We must be careful. You do not look well yourself to-night. You are pale."

As they rose from the table, Conchita took her father's arm. Passing through the hall, the old man stopped before the macaw and stroked its head. The bird ruffled its feathers, and in the darkness its colors shone with the brilliance of a skyrocket bomb. Garford remarked upon its beauty.

"You should see it when it is in feather," said Don Alfonso. "It is moulting now, and dull."

The girl signed to Garford to make no answer, and they went on into the library, where the old man sank listlessly into his chair. Followed by Garford, Conchita went to the piano.

"Don't you think father acts strangely?" she half whispered.

"He seems tired," answered the young man. "I was surprised by what he said at dinner; but I didn't know—I'm not used to those highly seasoned dishes."

"Then his remark about the bird," added Conchita. "I never saw its plumage more gay."

"Yes, that was odd. It is dark there, though, and you must remember that old people's eyes aren't as good as ours." Garford tried to put a comforting note into his voice. "I think that after a good rest he'll be all right."

"Still, I wish you would stay to-night. Somehow I am terribly uneasy."

To this Garford agreed, and Conchita

to raise her spirits, played a little Hungarian dance. Up and down the piano her fingers tripped until the room was filled with a pattern of varying notes. They seemed to join hands and leap from ceiling to floor of the shadowed library.

When she finished, her father looked up and spoke.

"Conchita," he said, "how can you stand the piano so badly out of tune? We must have it attended to. I have noticed that it gets flatter every day."

Conchita went to him and knelt before him on the floor.

"Tell me," she said, stroking his hair, "wouldn't you like to go to bed? You don't seem yourself to-night."

He again sank back exhaustedly, and his speech was almost a whisper.

"Perhaps it would be best," he replied.

She led him to his room, and called Felipe to help him to undress. For a short time afterward she and Garford walked back and forth in front of the house. The young man was racking his brain for words to comfort her.

Across the valley the waterfall hung like a great sword at the waist of a black-belted giant, and into the bowels of the lake the moon cast a quivering spear; but neither her companion nor the loveliness of the scene interested Conchita. She gazed, abstracted and preoccupied, at the ground. Then she turned toward the house, and, Garford having offered to go to the city for a doctor if Don Alfonso was not better in the morning, they looked into his room before retiring. The old man was sound asleep.

Sleep, however, did not come to Garford. He lay in the high, canopied bed and tossed back and forth, staring alternately at the bare, rough plastered walls and the bright, moon-washed court, with its pool and fountain, surrounded by flower beds and irregular moss-covered walks.

He thought of Conchita. Realizing how impotent was his sympathy, an unaccustomed feeling of helplessness possessed him. And when, three or four times during the night, he saw her go to her father's room, he wished heartily that the desert would turn again into the sea from which it came.

V

IN the morning Garford rose early and took a walk along the shore of the lake. The grass and the gay flowers woven into

it had all the brightness of a Spanish shawl. Fish leaped from the water in dazzling rainbow flashes. Shrill bird calls filled the air, and over the mountains and the sky was a brilliant mingling of blue and gold.

When he returned to the house, a servant told him that Conchita wished him to come to her father's room. There Don Alfonso lay listlessly, propped up on the pillows, while Conchita knelt by his side, weeping. When Garford entered, she looked up sorrowfully, and then cast her eyes toward her father.

The whole bright confusion of sound and color poured through the open casements that looked out upon the valley. Quail filled the air with their musical calls. The sun threw a shower of dancing spangles upon the lake. Butterflies fluttered like loosed petals above the flowers; but the old man stared with dulled eyes that seemed to see some inferno or odious pit.

When Garford stood by his side, Don Alfonso looked up with an unearthly, gargoyle grin. He gave a chuckle that made cold-footed bugs scamper up the young man's spine, and then spoke in an uncanny monotone:

"You have made a bad bargain, *señor*," he said. "Do you see what has happened to my valley—how bleak and colorless and quiet it has become? Even the birds and insects have left. There is nothing but sand and dry, wind-blown leaves." He uttered another hideous chuckle. "I have fooled you, *señor*! Did I not tell you that Eden Valley was mine?"

The girl sobbed. Garford went to her in complete confusion and despair. She laid her hand on the old man's cheek, and turned him toward her.

"Father," she said, "can't you see that everything in the valley is just as it has always been?"

"Don't be absurd, my dear!" replied the old don softly. "We have a joke on the *señor*, our guest. Look how the distant hills close in! I have just removed space from my world. It is nothing more than a gray photograph of sand and dead branches." He sank down in the pillows, and his voice seemed to come from a great distance, or through a wall. "Now the sides close in like drawn curtains at a play, and I could hold the whole picture in my hand. Now it has dwindled to a dot." His voice faded to a faint whisper. "And even that, *señor*, you may not have!"

David Rudd

A ROMANCE OF OLD ST. LOUIS AND THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER

By Ralph E. Mooney

XXVIII

MCKENZIE, the engineer, was right. David had made his last run on the Mississippi. Within ten days he said good-by to his crew and arranged for the sale of the Henry Chouteau III.

The David Rudd of the river, the tall man at the wheel of a steamboat, disappeared. A landsman replaced him. He was a huge fellow, who towered above other men on the street, and who silently extended a great brown hand for them to clasp. He was in the middle forties, and in the full flush of life—a solid, self-controlled man who managed somehow to be cheerful, despite memories that pained him, despite a fearful disgust that crept into his heart at odd times.

Men bred in the open gain more than physical strength. They gain a philosophy of life. The farmer's fields and woods are always blended in his opinions. The seaman's mind is like a tossing waste, in which emotions come, grow large, and pass.

David, in the days of his distress, would close his eyes to think, and would see in reverie the river coming around a bend, outspread in a mighty, rolling flood. It stood for the inevitable. The men upon its bosom were victims of the inevitable. Storms, wrecks, explosions, were not things of human contriving; they were inevitable, and must be so accepted.

The new David Rudd lived in a stone-front house on Pine Street, near Grand Avenue. It was a residence chiefly remarkable for a huge blue china cat that stood, by way of ornament, in the front hall, just before the stair landing. An old negro kept the lawn smooth, and an old negress, beloved of the neighborhood, whose name was Mammy Clementine, managed the house and the new David Rudd.

It was observed that the man was devoted to his son and daughter, and people who knew his story were delighted to see how quickly he won the hearts of the young people. On summer evenings, for many years, it was common to hear him reading to them, his voice booming through the open windows in a heavy monotone. Sometimes he would be talking with great animation, and his discourse would be interspersed with sharp exclamations in French. At these times the name "Trudeau" would often be repeated, and people who knew him well would realize that he was telling of his early days, and of the fine old Frenchman who had given him his education and his introduction to St. Louis people.

Time soon ceased dragging in twenty-four-hour lengths for David. It was not long before months and years were going to the rear with a remorseless swiftness that hurt him—when he realized it.

He became prosperous. His talent for seeing the facts of a business deal had not deserted him, and, once he gave up his dream of river life, he made rapid progress on land. He had a certain amount of money to begin with, and he invested it wisely—some of it with Ned Lane, who was building up a large wholesaling institution. It was a wonderful period for men with ready money or good credit. Opportunities to engage in enterprises of a basic nature existed on all sides—enterprises which could scarcely fail to succeed, because of the growing demand for them.

In time he became one of a group of older men who were able to play with money as men play with checkers, shifting it here and there, capturing it here and there, and, every once in a while, doubling or trebling the value of a counter. He assisted in organizing corporations, and issuing stock,

and doing various things with the surplus and the dividends.

There was nothing out of the way in all this. David and his associates were all men who had a big part in the development of St. Louis and the Southwest. Some had begun their struggles in a day when all payment was made in produce or direct labor. Others had followed the Western trails, risking life and property as traders to Santa Fe or as seekers of gold in California and Colorado. Not one but had faced hardship and danger in the beginning, and, consequently, not one but felt that he had a conqueror's right to take what he willed from a terrain he had won.

"First come, first served," was deemed a particularly fair motto, and as these men were first come, they held to it. The game of financiering was a great game, and was played through many great days by players who could not conceive that any sane person would object to it. There were never more surprised men in the history of the world than those same gaming financiers, in the late nineties of the last century, when people began to call them thieves and malefactors, and to cry to Congress for laws to curb them. Most of them died utterly unable to understand the moral obliquity of their critics.

One day in 1880, as David was passing along Olive Street, he heard a curious clatter and shouting from overhead. Having free time, he went to seek the source of it. He traced it to a room upon the fifth floor of an office building.

Entering, he was confronted by a scene unlike anything the world had known before. The room—a large one—was provided with racks of rough lumber, on which were mounted a number of small square boxes. Overhead was a tangle of iron wire, brought in through a cupola on the roof of the building.

A dozen youths of indeterminate age were running to and fro, carrying a skein of insulated cords about their necks. Now and then they dashed up to a box, put one end of a cord in a clip provided to receive it, and shouted into a black mouthpiece at the other end. This done, they turned and shouted at one another. They seemed to be enjoying themselves greatly, and frequently they would stop their running to scuffle.

As David watched, somewhat bewildered,

he was led aside by a slender, quiet man, who wore a drooping cavalry mustache, and whose eyes twinkled with amusement.

"Like bedlam, isn't it?" he asked.

David voiced assent to this.

"And yet," said the man with the cavalry mustache, "it is a wonderful thing, the telephone!"

"What?" asked David. "Is this the St. Louis Telephonic Exchange?"

For the newspapers had been lavish in their descriptions of the queer instrument that permitted people to listen over wires and hear others talk, sing, or play cornets in distant parts of the city.

"It is," the other man proudly replied. "These young men are telephone operators, the very first in the world—well, in the West, anyhow."

David introduced himself, and found that he was talking to the manager of the exchange, whose name was Durant.

"It would seem that a number of instruments are in use even now," remarked David.

"We have more than forty—nearly fifty—subscribers," boasted Durant.

"Do you—do you expect the thing to succeed in a business way?" asked David.

Durant nodded emphatically.

"I do," he said. "We are now conducting a magnetic messenger service here, at another office. It has several hundred subscribers, but we expect the telephone to supplant it some day. The city is growing, Mr. Rudd, and the loss of time in sending messengers, and in writing letters, is terrific. The people here and all over the land are crying for this device."

Then Durant, who had been an artillery officer in the war until disease forced him on the retired list in 1863, and who had then reentered the service as a military telegrapher, explained the workings of the telephone exchange, and exhibited its chief marvel, the switchboard. Durant had built the board himself, buying the fittings from a hardware store near at hand. His demonstration of it was immensely interesting, and before David left the room he had passed through the amazing experience of talking through a wire to a friend who was three blocks away.

The incident led to a firm friendship with Durant, and to an investment which eventually proved to be the most profitable of all that David made. He was associated with the development of the telephone for

many years. The work was especially suitable for him. It was pioneering in a new field, and it required the handling of men.

David remained in it, more or less actively, until he saw Durant's original switchboard grow to an enormous, honeycombed apparatus which gave facilities for a thousand connections to the old board's one. He saw the network of wires from the central office grow so heavy that it obscured the light in the streets and alleys below.

Meanwhile, the years swept along, ever more rapidly.

XXIX

DAVID's son, John Trudeau Rudd, was large of frame, and, when muscle began to cover the boy's bones, he resembled his father in a marked way. He was mechanically inclined, and after young Professor Crowell opened the Manual Training School, David had the pleasure of entering his son and of watching him make satisfactory progress. John won few honors in scholarship, but many in dexterity. Leaving school, he spent a few years in a drafting room, and then entered the office of a consulting engineer. Eventually he became a member of the firm.

The daughter of the house, Alice, seemed to have inherited characteristics from some unknown ancestress. She became a slender young lady with black hair, animated features, and large blue eyes. She was curiously self-contained and self-sufficient, and refused to ask for help in procuring things she wanted. She took pleasure in scheming to get money of her own—usually by the exercise of economy in making necessary purchases. She insisted upon being given the money to buy her wearing apparel, and she almost invariably managed to make the sum provided buy some extra article.

Before she was twenty, older women got into the habit of shouldering the main responsibility for church fairs or charity bazaars upon Alice Rudd. She had a mysterious way of compelling profits from such affairs, so that her undertakings would raise a much larger amount than those of women who were more churchly but less keen. David, watching her development with affectionate curiosity, noted her somewhat narrow countenance and quizzical eyebrows, and had a feeling that she was to a certain extent a reincarnation of Zebulon Starr.

She reminded him of Starr, again, because of her insight into his own mentality. She seemed to understand him thoroughly, and to meet him upon common ground. With all her practicality, she was affectionate—immensely so. When he looked back to the grim days following the departure of his wife, he could recall that it was Alice who first showed comprehension of his feelings, and who first realized that she had been led to value him falsely.

During her adolescence, she discussed his business affairs until she seemed to know as much of them as he. Later, indeed, David often sought her advice—but that came at a time when he, for some incomprehensible reason, found himself unable to keep abreast of affairs.

The central figure of the Rudd home, for many years, was Mammy Clementine. The old negress, formerly a slave of Dr. Trudeau, became frail after 1875. Her black skin hung upon her cheeks in thousands of tiny wrinkles, and her neck looked like old leather. Her hands, hard and worn with steady work, shrunk in size until Alice was able to tease her about them.

Clementine ran the house as capably as a steward. She went to market herself, driven by her husband, Marcel, in the buggy which David was able to own after his business affairs grew easy. Before the buggy was purchased, she went afoot, or on the Olive Street cable cars, while Marcel carried her baskets.

While the children were in their teens, she acted as nurse, confidante, and monitor for them. Later, she became a sort of despot, and inflicted merciless tongue lashings upon any one who broke the arbitrary rules by which she governed the household.

She was inflexible in demanding that all should be on hand at the proper hours for meals, and that books, papers, hats, and gloves should be kept in appointed places. If David left the window shades in his room at uneven levels, she sulked about it. If Alice displayed a lack of appetite, following schoolgirl feasts, Mammy Clementine grumbled. If John raided her pantry, she publicly rebuked him. David carelessly diagnosed her more sullen humors as "nigger spells," but she had her way with him, nevertheless.

In her gentle moments, she won their hearts individually and collectively.

"Missy," she would say to Alice, "I hopes I's goin' dress yo' in yo' weddin'

gown, before long. We's goin' fix yo' hair smooth. We ain' goin' friz it, like they does now. Den yo' little cap goin' fit pretty and yo' goin' look like an angel!"

When she discovered David in some passage of affection with his daughter, she would chuckle loudly.

"Lawdy, it done come true! I done tole him it would. When you and John uz babies, missy, he never have time to come roun' you; but jus' wait, I says, jus' wait twell they grows up—den we'll see! And didn't we? Doesn' he jus' worship the groun' you walks on, now? Laws! De men all alike, missy. I knows!"

On cold evenings in winter, Mammy Clementine and Marcel were often brought into the upstairs sitting room with the family, for that was the warmest room in the house, on account of its coal grate. During the summer, they had a special place to sit upon the lawn—a point near the forward corner of the house, where there was usually a faint breeze from the south. The family often sweltered in its customary position near the stone steps that led down from the entry, but no member of it ever thought of infringing upon the servants' territory.

Mammy Clementine was the first to leave the house on Pine Street. She died quite suddenly, during the early eighties, leaving a gap in the family group that was never filled. No one of them forgot the picture her wrinkled countenance made as it lay placid on her pillow, underlaid with the golden tint that comes to darkies after death. Neither did they forget the mute grief of Marcel, who survived her. Marcel was unable to express himself, but his bent figure, seated in the sun of the back yard, haunted them for days.

The funeral was an affair such as is seldom seen now, with dozens of black relatives and white friends mingling in common reverence at the grave. Clementine was buried, as all family servants of the old school were buried, in the family lot in Bellefontaine Cemetery. Her grave was placed near that of her old master, Dr. Trudeau.

At that time David had a small office in a building not far from the telephone exchange. It was furnished with a large flat-topped desk of battered walnut for himself, and a golden oak desk that resembled a piano box for the young man who copied

his letters, kept his books, and ran errands, for the total sum of twelve dollars a week.

One wall of the room was given to shelves, which were loaded with box files and office supplies. The letter press stood in a corner behind the door. Above David's desk hung a picture of General Washington on a white horse, and above the assistant's desk was a picture of the wigwam in which the Republican convention of 1860 was held.

One day, shortly after Mammy Clementine's funeral, David was alone at his desk, when some one tapped lightly on the office door. David opened it, to be confronted by a little slip of a woman, who returned his bow with earnest scrutiny.

She was middle-aged, but her hair was gray, and her costume bore evidences of having been made over from a style ten years old. She wore a black silk dress with ruffles of the same material and a black velvet basque with wide sleeves trimmed with black lace, and caught at the neck with a loose knot of black velvet ribbon. Her bonnet was also of black velvet, but was trimmed with roses.

After a moment of hesitation she began to smile faintly. David gasped and extended his hand.

"Sally Anne!" he cried.

The arm which came from the flowing sleeve of her basque was thin, yet the flesh drooped to the under side of it. There were wrinkles in her face, and she had an expression of timidity.

David found himself embarrassed as she replied, quite in her old voice, and rallied him for not recognizing her sooner. He made an awkward inquiry after her health as he placed her in a chair. An impish light came into her eyes. She glanced at him sidewise, and he had a ghostly glimpse of Sally Anne of the fifties.

"I'm feeling fine," she said.

"I'm glad," he answered. "I've often wondered about you. I've often thought I would brave the Southern lion and call upon you."

She laughed, a little sadly.

"I didn't stop fighting the war as soon as the men did," she said. "I've stopped now. I want to talk to you."

"And I want to talk to you," he answered. "Do you still live in the county?"

"Still in the old house, David—my uncle's house. You must remind me to leave in time for my train."

He noted the time.

"We'll talk a while, and then I'll drive you to the station," he planned.

Then they settled to conversation.

"I feel right mean, David, and I want to apologize," said Sally Anne. "I cut off your friendship and acted like a cat, during the war. I couldn't very well help it. I did feel it so—especially after my little cousin, Joe, was killed at Pea Ridge. I hated the Yankees. I still do; but when I heard how you acted about Clementine, why, I knew that you might be an Abolitionist, but you weren't a Yankee. A Yankee would never have understood about her funeral as you did. You're one of us, David—one of the people of this country around here. Do you understand?"

"I never blamed you for being loyal to your people, Sally Anne."

"Well," she went on, "what I feel meanest about is old Dr. Trudeau. I wanted to tell you about him. I was there when he died, David."

David nodded.

"I ought to have come to you long ago. He sent for me on the last day. That was just after Fort Donelson, remember, and your wife was not able to go to him, of course, because your little girl was to be born within a few hours. I went there and found the doctor, with Marcel and Clementine and your son John up in that big old room at the northwest corner of his house. I suppose you know the one I mean. It seemed to have been his room for always."

"No," said David, shaking his head. "That was my room when I lived with him. He used to have a room with a southern exposure. He was particular about the southern exposure. I remember he kept a sort of record of the direction of the wind, to prove that the theory of southern exposure was right."

"Well, David, he was there, looking like the ghost of the doctor we knew in our young days. You remember how he used to carry himself, and how his face always seemed pink and hearty, and, even if his hair was white, how full and fluffy it used to be?"

"Indeed I do!" concurred David. "I remember, too, how he used to toss his mane and roar when he argued with James Hicks and the other men who came to see him."

"All that was gone from him," continued Sally Anne. "His face was thin, David,

and his hair was stringy. You could see that Marcel and Clementine had done their best to brush it nicely, but it wouldn't respond. Even his eyes were dull. They didn't seem to see me. When I came in, he was talking to little John, and trying to play with him, but he couldn't lift his hands, and there was a look on his face which frightened John, so that the little fellow kept whimpering and drawing back. I remember the old man's disappointment at that—it was as if a shadow had fallen over him. He told Clementine to take the boy away. Then he looked directly at me, and said:

"I look like death, Sally Anne, and it frightens the little one."

"After that he talked. That was what he wanted me for—to talk—to talk of you. He went on and on about you, telling what a quick boy you were to learn, and how you rescued him one night on the levee, and told him so proudly that you were an engineer on the old Telegraph No. 2. He wanted me to tell him about the days—"

Sally Anne stopped abruptly.

"The days," added David, "when we were courting, and were silly enough to quarrel."

"Yes," admitted Sally Anne. "Yes—it was that; and we talked and talked until he became very weak, and the doctor came in and sent me away. I waited a while, and they finally called me back again. His eyes had failed by then, so he whispered for me to come close beside him. He tried to give me some message for you, but couldn't, and they told me to step back while the doctor tried to restore him. The medicines had no effect, and the old man began to mumble. He spoke your name several times. Finally Clementine told him the last news they'd had of you."

"'Marse David is sick,' she said. 'He can't come, doctor.'"

"At that he flushed and became real lifelike for a moment. I was silly enough to think he had passed a crisis, and was getting better."

"'Sick?' he asked. 'David sick?'"

"Clementine answered."

"'He's got the pneumonia, marster.'"

"I'll never forget what happened then. He fell back on his pillow, and seemed to look away beyond us—off to great distances. He stayed that way for as much as half a minute. Then he uttered a positive shout."

"'No, no!' he said. 'Take me! Take me!'"

"The doctor jumped to quiet him, but he died almost at once."

When David spoke, his voice trembled.

"Poor old doctor! Sally Anne, I don't believe I will ever realize how much he cared for me."

"I know, David. Oh, I wish I hadn't been so silly! I should have told you about it long ago."

XXX

As David drove with Sally Anne to the station of the narrow-gage railroad, they enjoyed an hour of reminiscence. Recalling acquaintances led them to recall personages, places, and events. For a short time they lived in the days of tight trousers and boots, enormous skirts and parasols.

Sally Anne remembered meeting General Grant just before he gave up farming in St. Louis County and went to Galena, Illinois, to enter the leather and hide business. David remembered a spirited talk delivered by Senator Benton, shortly before his death. Both remembered Nathaniel Lyon, who saved Missouri for the Union, only to die in one of the first battles of the Civil War.

Sally Anne was chattering of the great county families of the old time—the De Givervilles, the Kingsburys, the Dents, the Russells, and the Bents—when David came to a stop before the station and got down, offering his arm. She uttered a cry of dismay.

"David! You make me feel that I'm a hundred years old. Think of it, we're talking of days that passed twenty-five and thirty years ago!"

"And yet we're not so old," rejoined David, looking up at her.

"Nor so young, if you ask me, sir!"

"Do you still play the piano in the evenings, and sing?"

She whitened and bent her head. Her voice was gay enough, however, when she replied.

"Why, David," she said, "the boys stopped coming years ago, and the old piano very nearly fell to pieces. I probably swept it out into the yard one day."

David wriggled uncomfortably.

"Too bad, Sally Anne!"

"Bless you," she went on, "I ceased to be a possibility soon after the war. There was one old bachelor—a neighbor from

over near the St. Charles Road, who had been turned down by every other woman in the county—who hung on persistently for a long time after that; but he—well, he used this plug tobacco, and not very carefully, so at last I had to send him away. Since then nobody has come near me but the farm hands who bring in the milk. I've tried my wiles on two or three of them, but all I do is frighten them away and make Brother Robert mad because he has to hire new ones."

"What do you do nowadays?" asked David.

"Oh, we're not planters any more. We're just country people. I try to help Brother Robert run the farm—and I seem to put in most of my time quarreling with my cousins over pieces of furniture. When the last generation of the Fitzwilliams passed on, they carefully called every one of us in, and promised us the choice bits of mahogany from their old homes. Apparently they promised each piece three or four times over; so we have bad feelings about it, and get up all kinds of intrigues and schemes among ourselves to bring them into our possession. One of us will win eventually, I suppose, and be able to set up in business as a junk dealer."

With which she gave David a gay smile and scrambled down from the buggy, leaning upon his arm.

"Couldn't you come to dinner with my little family?" asked David. "I don't know what our new housekeeper will give us, but—"

"No, I must hurry back to Brother Robert; but I'm mighty glad I came in. It was really quite an effort. Trips to town are few and far between for me now."

"Need I say that I'm glad?" asked David.

"I don't think so. You've just been bubbling for the last half hour. I hope you won't be depressed later!"

"Depressed? By your visit?"

Sally Anne shook her head. Her face became serious and worn.

"No—by memories. I often am, David, when I get to thinking about those days, as we have this afternoon. They do seem so far away and so delightful!"

But David was not depressed. He drove to the house on Pine Street smiling, and was a gay figure at the dinner table.

After dinner he retired to the second-floor sitting room and read, not over-atten-

tively, from a book. Alice was at the piano in the parlor downstairs, and the ripple of a Chopin *étude* filled the air. He stopped reading. The flow of notes, with a carefully accented melody underlying it, fitted his mood. It was hard to pick out that melody. At times it was lost altogether, but it always came back again. It was like a strain that had flowed through his whole life.

Long before Alice finished, he put his book aside and seated himself at a table.

"I'll send her this little note," he muttered. "Heaven knows, it's time I saw something of her again!"

The note was addressed to Sally Anne:

DEAR LADY FITZWILLIAM:

Some of the boys may have stopped coming, but I know of one who is yearning to have the privilege of an old-fashioned evening call. If you will let me come to see you, just this once, I'll promise to observe all the proprieties and depart by nine o'clock.

Sincerely yours,
DAVID.

Sealing the missive, David set out to mail it. He encountered Alice in the lower hall.

"You have no idea, Alice," he informed her gravely, "what a wonderful convenience these stamps and corner mail boxes are. I can remember when you could scarcely buy stamps, and you had to mail letters at the post office or not at all."

"Gracious!" said Alice. "When was that, daddy?"

"Oh, when I was just a boy," he answered. "Forty-five, I think it was, and shortly afterward. I don't think they had stamps before forty-five. Anyhow, they didn't have envelopes, and it cost twenty-five or even fifty cents to send a letter any distance."

For a day or two David was humming and singing as he went about the city. Then came Sally Anne's answer, naming an evening for the call.

He did not go to her on horseback this time. He traveled to the nearest station of the narrow-gage railroad, and was met by a surrey driven by an old negro, who made a great pretense of recognizing him.

Sally Anne appeared upon the veranda of the Fitzwilliam home as he clambered down. For a moment they stood in almost the same position as that into which they had fallen, by chance, years before; but it was an autumn night, with chill in the air,

and dampness coming from the dead leaves in the yard.

"Isn't this romantic?" Sally Anne said jestingly.

"Indeed it is!" answered David. "You should have seen the children when they saw me dressed to go out. Pshaw! There I go—talking about the children, when I've come to call upon my old sweetheart!"

"I'm glad you admit she's old!"

"I didn't mean that she's old. I meant my one-time sweetheart."

"And how do you know she's that? Couldn't she still be? Don't forget that once you were willing to fight a duel over me, sir!"

David became grave.

"So I was," he replied; "and it was here you scolded me about it."

Sally Anne put out her hand suddenly.

"Don't let's talk about that," she said in a suppressed voice. "We must go in, anyhow. It's very chilly."

She led him to the drawing-room where she had entertained him years before. He found it almost unchanged, except that the long mahogany davenport opposite the piano had become sway-backed, and many of the big chairs had new coverings. The candles which had once filled the brackets on the piano and on the walls of the room had been replaced by fancy kerosene lamps, which gave off a noticeable odor.

For a short time their talk was formal, but they had too much in common for this to continue. Sally Anne went off upon a long diatribe on the degeneration of music. She could remember when every girl was an accomplished pianist, who would entertain even casual callers with a sonata or *morceau*. Now several of her nieces and cousins could not play at all, and several more seemed unable to attempt anything more inspiring than "Ta-ra-ra Boom-de-ay," or bits from silly light operas. Conventions were changing, too, and young girls were not chaperoned at all times. It was disgusting!

Sally Anne was becoming old-maidish. What a shame, thought David! What a wonderful, bright little creature she would have been, if she had kept in touch with life! If—

She was opening the piano.

"You spoke of it," she explained, "and so I had it tuned, but gracious, I can't play as I used to. My fingers are as stiff as boards. I found a treasure, though—my

old family songster, filled with music for the home and fireside."

David came up behind her. He looked uneasily about him.

"My, I wish the boys were on hand!"

"Don't, David," she warned gently. "Joe was here that night."

"I apologize," murmured David. "I keep forgetting things. So much has happened since—"

"What shall I play?"

In an attempt to enliven the atmosphere, he forced a laugh.

"Don't you remember that weird song you used to give us about the maniac? I think it was called 'The Maniac.' Couldn't you—"

"Oof! 'The Maniac' is beyond me. Goodness, I'm glad *that* type of song has passed! Wasn't it horrible?"

She struck a few chords, and began to play from the family songster—"I Cannot Sing the Old Songs," "The Camptown Races," "Old Grimes Is Dead." Sometimes she tried to sing, and David tried to join her, but for the most she simply played them over, stiffly accentuating the melody and the sentimental softness of the songs.

David was swept away. For the moment he saw the facts of his life as accurately as he saw the details of business transactions; and he saw that he had made a mistake years before, when he failed to make any real effort to end the misunderstanding with Sally Anne. He had given her up to waste his life in a futile struggle.

"Blue-eyed Mary," "Rosin the Bow," "Life on the Ocean Wave," and "Ben Bolt." Moisture filled David's eyes as he looked down at her. Brown taffeta, which rose high about her neck, had replaced the alluring evening dress of the fifties; but, after all, there was a great deal of the old Sally Anne left to him. The poise of her head and the set of her shoulders were the same. Her profile was delicate as ever. She had spirituality and depth; and she was loyal—loyal to her family, to her principles—loyal, in the end, to him. She had made a trip to the city to tell him of the old doctor.

Of a sudden he caught her in his arms and kissed her cheek. Her head drooped. He heard her sob.

"Sally Anne," he whispered, "what fools we've been all these years!"

"Oh, David!" she answered. "I hoped you would feel that way!"

She moved so that she could respond to his embrace. A great happiness came into her countenance.

"David," she revealed, "I've prayed this would happen. I knew my mistake years ago!"

David spoke in an inspired way:

"We can correct mistakes now, Sally Anne. We can still be married. I will see a lawyer, and fix it up so that I'll be free. We've lost a lot, but we can have the rest of our lives together, anyhow."

She fell to sobbing.

"Oh, do you think so?" she asked. "Can you ask me again, after all this time?"

"I am asking you." He disengaged himself and faced her, smiling. "Come," he said, "I'll do it in style—in the old style." He dropped on one knee. "Sally Anne Fitzwilliam, will you do me the honor to become my wife? I love you madly and adoringly!"

"Yes, indeed!" cried Sally Anne, laughing and flinging herself into his arms again.

The night was one of transcendental happiness, and so was the next morning; but during the afternoon David received a note from Sally Anne:

DEAR DAVID:

What a pair we are! For a short time I actually believed it was possible, and I think you did, too—you with grown children to be scandalized, and me with a score of married nieces and nephews; you with the habits of a lifetime, and me with the crotchets of forty years on a farm.

It was a beautiful dream and a beautiful moment, and I'm glad it came to us at last; but it's too late for marriage, Davy. We had our chance and tossed it away, and we must simply make the best of things. I still love you—I always have loved you—but love doesn't mean the same thing now that it used to.

Ever yours,

SALLY ANNE.

P. S.—Of course, this doesn't mean that you mustn't come to see me. I want you to come often.

David tossed the letter on his desk and grew red in the face. Then he took it up and went through it a second time. He began to smile. Sally Anne was right. The idea of marriage, at their age, was a joke. He answered the note in the same tone of raillery that she had used.

Upon that basis their friendship endured many years. David often called at Sally Anne's home, and sometimes, when Sally Anne was able to come to St. Louis over-

night, they went out together. They never ceased to tease over the possibility of an elopement, even when they became quite white and feeble.

Once Sally Anne revealed to him that her great hope had been that some day he would come to propose to her a second time, and would take her in his arms. She had always ached for him to caress her, she said.

XXXI

It was a dusty little room. The papers on the cherry-stained table were powdery, except where finger-prints of varying age showed on them, and there was dust in the grooves of the table legs, which had been cut by a lathe to resemble a braid of hair. The bare floor had been swept, but only enough to make ridges of dust, all going in one direction.

The man at the table had gray drift on his black vest, which was unbuttoned. His wrinkled skin was brown in color. His mutton chop whiskers did not look dusty, but he wore a sharp-pointed standing collar, which rasped his brown neck with edges that were smudged and cloudy. His name was Byron Cornelius, and he described himself as a real estate man.

"The exact names to go on the deeds," David Rudd explained to him, "are John Trudeau Rudd and Mary Stanward Rudd—that covers the boy's case—and Dr. Albert Walling and Alice Rudd Walling."

"And John has chosen the property on West Belle Place?" queried Cornelius. "That's good judgment, I think."

David was standing at the door, with his back to Cornelius. He looked through an outer office that was long and narrow and cluttered with desks which loomed like boulders against the distant sunshine of Chestnut Street. He faced about and revealed himself as a heavily built, white-haired man. There was about him the look of hard use, and of ability to stand hard use, that is observed in pieces of old machinery. His face was unwrinkled, his eyes unflinching. There was more evidence of mentality in his expression than ever before—not that he had lacked mentality, but that his great physical development, his native shrewdness, had prevented its becoming manifest until time had subordinated these other things.

"I suppose so, but West Belle seems too far west ever to be of much value. The

house is located forty blocks from the river—think of that!"

The real estate man frowned judicially.

"Of course, it will be suburban property for a long time, but it will increase in value."

David nodded.

"Dr. Walling," he remarked, "must stay nearer the heart of things—that is, the heart of his practice. He prefers the Washington Avenue house."

"Which is excellent, Captain Rudd—excellent for his purpose. The extra first-floor rooms are perfect for use as an office and an anteroom. Well, I will have the deeds completed and sent to you by special messenger before five o'clock this evening."

David Rudd nodded, chuckling.

"Be sure that you do," he admonished. "Remember, it would spoil the fun if I couldn't turn them over this evening."

"They'll be ready, sir," promised the real estate man. "A double wedding is an occasion that must not be marred, particularly where such munificent gifts as these are concerned. I must say, captain, you are doing the handsome thing by the young folks!"

David nodded. He paused near the door of the little office, twirling the wheel of a letter press.

"It was queer," he said. "They both fell in love last fall, and became engaged at almost the same time. I suggested the double wedding myself. It seemed best, and I wanted them to; but I've told you all this. I'm glad to be able to provide for them in this way."

"Of course," nodded Cornelius; "and you should be proud, too."

"Proud?" questioned David, in a queer tone. "Well, I'm trying not to let myself think so. Pride is a dangerous thing. I've learned to swallow pride. It's better to do so, and to give yourself to forethought." He lowered his gaze. "I made a mistake in my marriage—a big mistake—and I'm trying now to keep the youngsters from making one. I've been trying for years. My one prayer, if a man like me can be said to pray, is that they are choosing wisely. I hope I've taught them values."

"I'm sure you have," said Byron. "I'm sure of it."

"I feel so, too," muttered David. He met the little man's eye almost fiercely. "If I have," he declared, emotion throbbing in his voice, "I've done something far

better than merely achieving success in love for myself—at least, that's the way I look at it."

He left the little man fingering his papers with awe.

"The captain is marvelous!" soliloquized Byron.

Meanwhile David sought the street, and detached the leather strap by means of which his horse was tethered to an iron ring in the pavement.

It was mid afternoon. Soon he was driving westward beneath a double row of shade trees—sycamores with leaves not yet grown to the span of his hand, and maples with glossy little tufts of new green replacing the buds. The houses were no longer built in solid ranks, but were set apart in glistening patches of lawn. Newly painted iron railings separated the yards from the street. The hoofs of his horse crunched pleasantly in a gravel roadway. He turned over Garri-son Avenue, and west again.

Catching sight of his own house, he uttered an exclamation of surprise, and looked with eager interest. A long, striped awning had been set up to cover the front steps, from the curb of the street to the entryway. Such an awning was an innovation. David had seen one before, but had not come in active contact with it.

Alighting before the house, he tied his horse to an iron hitching post—artfully cast to resemble the trunk of a small tree, with a dozen knots protruding in all directions—and went to the railing that separated his own yard from the street. Giving vent to a shrill whistle, he hung over the railing until assured that the negro stableman, at the rear of the premises, had heard him and was coming to look after the horse.

Then he went, with a boyish thrill, to walk up to his door under the awning. It was a gay tunnel, with the sun coming through the canvas, and he remained in it, walking to and fro, for some time. Finally he passed on into the house, where one man from the florist was busy setting palms in the corners of the first floor rooms, while another was draping a cascade of orange blossoms between the front windows of the parlor. This was exciting, too, and required comment and conversation.

David ended his tour in the kitchen, where he held council with the white house-keeper who had replaced Mammy Clementine. Deciding the vital question as to when the wedding supper was to be served,

and reiterating directions to keep the champagne properly chilled by packing it in laundry tubs, with ice which the stableman was to procure, David started toward the front of the house.

He encountered Marcel in the hall.

"They're somebody to see you," said the old negro. "She's in the parlor."

Marcel followed David a little way, and then, with great excitement, detained him.

"Hit's de old mistis," he revealed, showing the whites of his eyes. "She come and say not to tell who she is. I s'pose it uz all right to let her in?"

"Yes," answered David, "I suppose it was."

When he entered the parlor, his wife stood at a window. She whirled quickly to greet him, her face a little sheepish.

Alice had grown plump. She had developed into the snugly dressed, overflowing type of woman. She wore a street suit, the jacket of which had sleeves puffed at the shoulders and lapels wide enough to project beyond the puffs. The jacket was cut in sharply at the middle, to make a "wasp" waist line, for that was the day when doctors were raving on the dangers of tight lacing, instead of the dangers of not lacing at all.

Her face had lost its bright vividness, and had acquired a slightly leonine set. A hint of coarseness in it made David think of the large, stringy-haired Irishwomen who brawled on the streets of a Hibernian colony known as Kerry Patch, not far from old Steamboat Row. Alice's hair was not stringy, and her voice was not particularly harsh, but the resemblance was there, nevertheless.

She evidently guessed something of his thought, for a certain eagerness faded from her features, and she mustered her dignity.

"Well, David!" she began awkwardly. "Here I am."

"I'm glad to see you," he replied, also embarrassed.

"Glad? No, you're not. I didn't expect you to be." She seated herself and chafed her hands nervously. "I don't intend to offer explanations, David. There's no use in it."

"Very little, certainly," agreed David.

She gave way for a moment to curiosity.

"I've been traveling a good deal," she said. "I've often wondered—did you ever get a divorce?" As he shook his head, she went on talking. "I never did, either.

"Don't think I'm hinting at a reconciliation, though. I'm merely asking." She gave him close scrutiny for a moment, and continued: "You wouldn't consent to a reconciliation, anyhow; and I would despise you if you did. I would try to make you miserable. I think I was born to make people miserable!"

David found himself in a mood for dispassionate humor.

"I can't help hoping that you made Johnson Hicks miserable," he said.

She refused to meet his eyes.

"I don't believe I ever succeeded with him as well as I did with you," she answered. "The fact that he ran away that morning tortured him more than anything I ever did to him—except when I reminded him of it now and then. I suppose you know that Johnson is dead?"

"I haven't been bothering much about him," replied David.

"I guess not. That was what I hated about you—you never bothered about anything except the work you had in hand. Then it was steamboats. Now, I understand, it's the telephone. People never really affected you, David. Well, he is dead. He died in New Orleans about four years ago. I heard it from an acquaintance. It was a long time after I had left him. I didn't stay with him very long, you know. As soon as I realized that he had merely used me as a weapon against you, for revenge—"

"You did realize that?" asked David.

"Of course. Oh, I'm not a dunce, David! I went to live with my father. He was very decent to me. Of course, he had considerable soot on his feathers, too; but he made money, at last. He left enough to keep me comfortable, so I've been able to run around a little. I've been abroad—in Europe."

"Did you like it there?"

"Oh, no and yes. I don't like traveling. It gives you too much time to think, and to find out that you are made of stuff that will never let you be contented."

She made a gesture which indicated that she was coming to the purpose of her visit.

"What have you done, David? Stayed here—prospered—raised the children? That's what I hear you've done. You may wonder, by the way, how I hear these things; but I've a correspondent here—nobody you know—a little woman who thinks me a terribly low creature, but who is ab-

solutely fascinated by the idea of exchanging letters with me. I don't dare to go to see her, because she'd be nervous every minute I was in her house; but she has kept me informed of St. Louis happenings. Tell me, David, did you—enjoy the children?"

David nodded.

"Yes," he said. "They have come to be companions for me. I have enjoyed them."

"I don't mean lately," she replied, her voice softening. "I mean at first, when they were still just youngsters. Did you enjoy them then? What did you do? Did you read to them—I remember how Alice used to like her books—and tell them stories, and answer questions? Did John want to romp with you, even as old as he was? Did he make you teach him to wrestle? I always told him you would, some day, when you were at home."

"We did all that," said David. "We had fine times in those days. I have always been grateful to you, Alice, for the fact that you bore such fine children."

A faint smile came on her lips, and there was moisture in her eyes.

"David?"

"Yes?"

"I want to see the children. That's what I came for. I don't mean I want to be included in the wedding. That would be—oh, I want to talk to them before they go off to set up in their own homes and get wrapped up in their own affairs. Can I, David?"

David tugged at a bell pull for answer. When Marcel appeared, he sent him to call John Trudeau and Alice, who were in their rooms on the second floor, making ready for the all-important event.

In a few minutes they appeared, preoccupied in manner, already wrapped in their own affairs. They recognized their mother immediately, and John went to greet her, but instead of offering to embrace her he extended his hand in a formal way. She hung back, her brows wrinkled, as if she was at a loss to decide upon a course of action.

Presently she uttered a little cry. There was pain in it.

"Kiss me," she begged of John. "Oh, please kiss me!"

Thus prompted, both greeted her with considerable affection, but it was plain to see that her presence disturbed them. She surveyed them hungrily, while she ex-

plained again that she did not intend to appear at the wedding.

"I only wanted to see you a few minutes before you were married," she concluded. "I want to give you a good wish for your future life—something to take with you—from me."

She went on, deluging them with questions about their respective mates, while they interrupted with desultory counter-questions. Finally she became very pale, and her eyes began to glow with a haunted light. She told them to hurry back to their rooms and continue making ready for the ceremony.

As they disappeared, she came to David and extended her hand. He took it gently, pitying her for the ordeal she had undergone. She was trembling.

"David," she quivered, "it must be worth a lot to know that you are responsible for them!"

She went toward the door.

"Would you like me to say I was a fool when I left you?" she asked. "Most men would. Well, I will say it—I was a fool." She hesitated, and then extended her arms. "David," she invited, "could you kiss me, too? Could you, please—"

He moved forward slowly. She drew back with an abrupt movement.

"No, no—don't! That's nonsense! Good-by, David."

She hurried away.

The double wedding took place at six o'clock. The guests filled about half the church. As David took his place a few steps from his daughter, ready to respond when the time came for his part in the ritual, he saw Alice in a pew at the rear, heavily veiled. He lost track of her afterward, and did not know when she left.

While he was riding home with the clergyman, he could scarcely follow the learned man's conversation. His wife's figure, silent, alone, in an expanse of empty pews, remained before his eyes. It seemed to waver in the flickering rays of the gas lights. David raised his chin high, surging with emotion. Alice had behaved well. He could take pride in remembering her.

For several hours the house on Pine Street throbbed to waves of sound. The hall, the parlor, the back parlor, and the dining room were crowded, and the din of conversation was punctuated by the shouts of young men and the shrieks of young

women. A clatter of cutlery and silverware was also to be heard.

Long before the older folk were ready to abandon their plates, one of the bridesmaids had seated herself at the piano, and dancing was under way. Non-participants were swept from the parlor and the rear parlor, while the uproar increased. The dancers tried each evolution of the day, *pas de quatre*, Ostend, and lancers. They were greatly hampered by lack of space. In the *pas de quatre*—later revived as the barn dance—they were compelled to form side by side in the rear parlor, in platoons. Then, when the beat called for it, they would advance like a company of infantry to the front parlor, where they would hop and whirl, jostling one another, shrieking, and shaking with laughter. At times the music would be drowned, and at other times it would carry faintly above the muffled thudding of feet.

David danced and shouted and joked, at first; but gradually he drifted aside with the older people, and stood sipping champagne and looking on.

After a time he became aware that people were no longer pressing close upon him, and that the noise had abated. Guests were leaving steadily. His nerves leaped in a sudden, agonized way. After it was over, he would be left alone amid the palms and orange blossoms. He would go upstairs and go to bed in a house that was empty of all save a few tired servants.

Durant's voice came to him, kindly and sympathetic, yet with a jesting note:

"Your work is done, David. Your responsibility is ended. From now on, you can be a gay bachelor!"

David's voice was harsh as he replied:

"From now on I'll be like the fellows who used to travel the river professionally. I'll live in the smoking room and the bar!"

Those within hearing laughed, but David did not join them.

"Are you going to keep this house?" asked Sally Anne, who was at his side.

The question inspired panic.

"I don't know," gasped David. "I hadn't thought about that."

When the carriages drove away, bearing his son and daughter, he mustered courage and acted like a small boy, calling good wishes and throwing rice; but when he returned to the house his eyes were wet. He seized upon Durant and a few others who were about to depart, and begged them to

stay. He kept them in the dining room until early morning. A great quantity of conversation flowed among them, but David heard none of it.

XXXII

THE years had begun to move with incomprehensible swiftness, even before the wedding. Afterward, they seemed to have the speed of birds on the wing. Months and seasons ran into one another and merged and jumbled.

For a long time David was one of the marked figures of St. Louis—as marked in his way as Dave Nicholson, the wholesale grocer, in his. Every morning, at half past seven, a young negro drove up before the door of the house on Pine Street and found David waiting, puffing at his morning cigar and pacing to and fro behind the polished windows. The drive down town took three-quarters of an hour, and it was always over the same course—along Pine Street to Sixth, and so to Olive.

For a while it was a period of cheerful morning greetings, exchanged with men in other buggies and men on the sidewalks. Later it was not so cheerful. The pavements and the other buggies began to hold young men who merely looked at David, but did not nod to him—young men who commented on him as a "fine old man."

Ned Lane died, and Marshall Keyes, who had clung to the river until he was bankrupt, killed himself one day. Alice died in New Orleans, and David went to her funeral. Marcel died, and the white house-keeper who had succeeded Clementine died. One by one the links that connected David with the fifties snapped.

Even the city did its share to break them. It grew past Grand Avenue, and forgot the older neighborhoods. It even invaded the old Cabanne farm, once a landmark on the road to Sally Anne's. Electric cars replaced the cable lines, and squadrons of people on bicycles made the streets nervous places to cross. Down town, the office buildings shot skyward one after another, and the house on Pine Street lost caste as boarding houses filled the neighborhood. Finally David gave it up, and went visiting here and there.

His life became a succession of days, except for the periods spent in the homes of his son and his daughter. These homes had become marvelous places. Each housed little creatures called grandchildren.

David observed the grandchildren with wonder, and, at every opportunity, called their parents' attention to the startling qualities they displayed. John's son was exceptionally strong. Before he was a year old he began craning his little neck and arching his little back—trying to sit up. Nothing quite like it was ever heard of before.

The David Rudd I knew was an old man. He spent the greater part of his time in the room behind the parlor at Cousin Laura's. Now and then he would become motionless, and would stare intently at the wall, listening. If I observed him and listened, too, I would make out the distant boom of a steamboat whistle. Sometimes he would merely resume reading as the sound died, and sometimes he would grunt in answer, giving a little snort of indulgence, such as a plainsman might give to a whinnying horse.

He had but little flesh, and his bones were so big that they stretched the skin of his hands and cheeks, causing white spots to show here and there amid the clear pink. His eyes were bright and blue, with seriousness in them, when he was alone with me. When others were present, or when we were out for a walk, they twinkled.

The twinkle, I fancy, was inspired by people who persisted in treating him as if he was aged. He knew the fallacy of their supposition, but they would refuse to be convinced of it, and would make a point of showing surprise at his strength and alertness, so that he was compelled to smile inwardly, out of deference to himself. It was a little joke of his later years.

A great many visitors found their way to the room behind the parlor at Cousin Laura's. John Trudeau Rudd, burly and upstanding, with gray hair about his temples, used to come regularly every two weeks. So far as I observed, being in and out of the room during their visits, they never talked of anything personal, but gave all their time to business subjects. Nevertheless, I remember very well that David Rudd fairly emanated glowing joy on the occasion of John's appearances, and that he never failed to mention them to his other visitors.

Quite often, for example, a subject would come up on which David Rudd was not well informed, and he would admit the fact, but would add that his son, who knew all about

it, had been in the day before, and had said so and so. In John's so and so the matter ended.

Alice came, too, of course. Her visits were much more frequent than John's, and, if they were not so carefully remarked, they gave fully as much pleasure at the time. I can remember David Rudd to this day as he would sit studying his daughter while she talked to him. I think she reminded him constantly of Zebulon Starr, for her visits would often bring forth a flood of reminiscences, which I heard with the same interest that I accorded to fairy stories and boys' books. As I said before, however, it was not possible for me to connect him directly with them. I was too young to be able to conceive of him as ever being anything but an old man who read books.

The grandchildren visited him one at a time, but they never stayed long. There were nine of them, so that there was one for every day in the week, with two extra. Looking back, I can see that theirs were duty calls. They used to come in politely, sit for an exact half hour, and then say:

"I must hurry on now, grandfather."

To which he would agree with a twinkle and pack them off. Then, after they were gone, he would become serious again, and would sit looking at his knobby old legs with a reproachful air.

He stayed at Cousin Laura's for a great many years. I suppose he became thinner and more wrinkled, but I was not conscious of it, for he never lost his alertness. Aunt Sally Anne died in 1904, the year of the World's Fair in St. Louis, and David Rudd was depressed for several days; but he stayed on, poring over his books and wandering about the neighborhood.

I completed my course in the grade schools, got my first suit with long trousers, and was sent to my first year at Central High School, and he was still at Cousin Laura's. The Roosevelt administration came to an end and President Taft took office, with David Rudd a bystander, twinkling and indomitable.

During the summer of 1909 we began to worry about him. He became suddenly frail, and yet, in spite of his waning strength, he persisted in lengthening the period of his constitutionals until they consumed all of the baking July afternoons. We found that he no longer went down town to visit old business acquaintances, but went straight to the levee, to walk back

and forth, staring out over the brown water of the Mississippi.

He must have treated himself cruelly in this, for I do not believe he could go to the levee without a shock. He had seen it during the big days, swarming with people. He had seen steamboats tied paddle box to paddle box, in a majestic rank that extended from Wash Street to Chouteau Avenue. In 1909 it was like a desert.

The cobblestones were empty of freight. Blades of grass and sprouting oats were growing between them. Away up toward the bridge there were one or two steamboats, with no sign of life about them; yet David Rudd went there again and again, and became a familiar figure to the roustabouts and loiterers who gathered under the railroad trestle that shaded the upper part of the expanse.

One evening I was called to Cousin Laura's to stay with him while the family went to some imperative social function. He had come back from the levee in a condition of exhaustion, Cousin Laura said, and she did not wish to leave him alone.

I found him seated in his old patent rocker, with one of his books open in his lap. A pipe lay beside him on the table, spilling dead ashes on the dark tapestry cover, as if he had begun smoking, but had found himself unequal to even that effort.

"Hello, my boy!" His voice was faint, with a hint of treble in it. Somehow it made me think of a light wind above the house tops, or above the open deck of a boat. "Glad you came over!" He smiled and made a little gesture with his hand. "You should have been with me to-day. I saw the Alton come in. My, it was grand! Her band was playing, and she was alive with people. She had an excursion trip. It carried me back to see a boat loaded like that. For a minute I thought I saw the old Celeste coming around the point behind her. When you're old, you see such things now and then. It's your eyes—and it was smoky. It never used to be so smoky down there. Did I ever tell you about the Celeste, my boy?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ned Lane was her master, and she was named for his wife. Each of us had the naming of his own boat. Mine was the Henry Chouteau, but we were going to build in 1861, and the next would have been the Trudeau. Oh, but I did tell you, didn't I?"

He became silent, looking at his book with an absent-minded air. I was in summer school, and had studying to do, so I excused myself, and he made ready to go on reading. I settled in the next room.

I struggled with problems in algebra for an hour or so—until about half past nine or ten, I think. Then I realized that the house was very still. I felt uneasy, and was about to go to the door and speak to David Rudd. While I hesitated, I was reassured by hearing him begin to sing in a low tone.

I remembered the song as one he had often used to entertain me in the days when I had made a habit of playing in the room with him:

"De captain stan' on de harrycane deck—
Ah, ha! Oh, ho!

Nobody like him, I expect—
Ha, ha, ha! Oh, ho!

As he stopped, a breeze came up and set the curtains of the parlor to rustling. I heard him turn a page.

Half an hour later he spoke.

"Sally Anne!" he whispered. "Sally Anne!"

His song had reassured me, for it had come in his normal voice, but in this low outcry there was a note that brought me to my feet at once. I hurried to the door of the room behind the parlor.

The David Rudd that I knew was sitting in the attitude I best remember. His head was bent a little forward, and he was smiling faintly, listening; but there came no sound of a steamboat whistle—only the rustling of the summer breeze.

THE END

MY WILD LOVE

I HEARD my wild love calling me;

But all in vain I heard,

In vain I looked around, for she

Kept hidden, like a bird

That in some secret, sunlit tree

We hear entranced, yet cannot see—

That, when too near our footstep falls,

Hushes its song and softly flies,

Then from some distant tree top calls,

Hidden more safely from our eyes.

She called me by the mountain stream,

Where many a summer day

In an unbroken, happy dream

Upon her breast I lay;

Along the pasture, through the glen,

I heard her calling me again;

And underneath our secret oak,

Forever haunted by her face,

I could have sworn she leaned and spoke,

Such magic has the place.

Alas, 'twas but an idle dream!

Still sang the bird, still ran the stream,

And green again the glimmering boughs

Where my wild love and I kept house,

With velvet mosses softly spread

To pillow her brave, golden head.

I heard my wild love calling me,

But my wild love I could not see!

Oliver C. Moore